THE MAGAZINE OF MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA INC.

MUSEUM NATIONAL

VOL 8 • NO 1 • AUGUST 1999

MANAGING CHANGE IN THE VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFTS

FRINGE BENEFITS: MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA'S 1999 CONFERENCE

A new council (1999–2001) was elected at the annual conference in Albury in May. For my own part, I accept with pleasure the honour of being elected unopposed and the opportunity to serve the museums of Australia until May 2001. By then, I will have been active in Museums Australia, and the Art Museums Association of Australia and the Museum Educators Association of Australia before that, for ten years!

I welcome new councillors and thank those continuing on council for their further commitment to the museums of Australia. A number of councillors retired at the elections and their service is warmly acknowledged. In particular, I want to thank Peter O'Neill, who has served on the executive council as treasurer over the past two and a half years.

As the offices of Museums Australia are transferred to Canberra, our national director, Paul Costigan, is taking hold of the reins. We welcome Paul to our organisation and look forward to even stronger partnerships developing between the national and state offices as our Canberra bureau, at the National Museum of Australia, takes shape. Simeon Kronenberg, former long-serving national director, continues to serve Museums Australia on the Museum Leadership Program.

There is no shortage of issues in the museum sector at this moment.

The impact of the GST on the not-for-profit sector requires significant consultation with the Australian Taxation Office in order to determine which services will be GST free, currently defined as those 'directly related to the curriculum'. While museums take their educational role to the core of their activities, education is perceived in its widest public application, rather than approached through a formal curriculum.

The Kemp Green Paper on funding Australian research has provoked much comment in educational institutions. Although widely perceived as funding solely for universities, the museum sector has also dipped into the Australian Research Council for funding to support their principal research projects. Museums, rather than art galleries, have been most successful in this area, particularly the state museums in Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. The shift of emphasis from basic research to research with direct commercial applications should allow museums to compete equitably with other research institutions for funding support. While the Minister, Dr David Kemp, acknowledges that funding is available across all disciplines, he singles out key areas for the 'commercialisation of [Australia's] research effort' as 'biotechnology and information technology'. My comments, reported in *The Age* on 30 June 1999, acknowledge the apparent 'reprieve for research into Australia's cultural heritage'. However, for museums, including art galleries, to have fair and equitable access to research funding will require a rethink of the baseline public support given to the cultural sector – in its entirety.

Meanwhile, strengthening the capacities of those senior museum professionals who drive forward our museums is the core role of the forthcoming Museum Leadership Program, supported by Museum Australia. Development of this program has been largely the initiative of the Gordon Darling Foundation, which saw the significant benefits for American (and some Australian) museum professionals in the Getty-supported Museum Management Institute development program run in the US, encouraged by Frances Lindsay, director of The Ian Potter Museum of Art at The University of Melbourne, and recent graduate of the MMI, and Derek Gillman, former deputy director of the National Gallery of Victoria, both of whom championed the need for such an intense learning environment in Australia. As this first course for forty participants was over-subscribed, Museums Australia anticipates that demand exists for the program to run biennially and that a need has been demonstrated for other opportunities for professional development for museum workers to be created.

Sue-Anne Wallace
President

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Sharon Peoples, *Ten Red Shoes* (detail), 1997, rayon on cotton, machine embroidered, 1250 x 530 mm. From the exhibition 100 Red Shoes, at Object galleries, 1999. Photo: the artist. Courtesy the artist and Object galleries.

THE MAGAZINE OF MUSEUMS AUSTRALIA INC.

MUSEUM NATIONAL

VOL 8 • NO I • AUGUST 1999

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.

MANAGING CHANGE IN THE VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFTS

ANNA CLABBURN

INTRODUCTION

Art galleries and museums share many professional issues these days, from naming rights to collection management and exhibition programming. What are we to make of this widespread blurring of traditional definitions? Perhaps this trend mirrors older debates about the nexus of art versus craft – form versus function, and never the twain shall meet. This 'old chestnut', like the conceptual division between museums and galleries, is now close to retirement in an environment where a range of significant structural changes have overtaken Australia's creative and cultural community.

In a climate where funding is no longer assured, qualifications are not automatic job-tickets, and audiences require constant quantifying and qualifying in order to validate a venue's existence, it seems somewhat petty to be arguing the toss about whether to call an exhibition space a museum, a gallery, an artspace, a collection house, or a backyard shed!

However, we do need to focus on the direction in which these merging boundaries are pushing us. What changes are occurring in the way we do our jobs and how much are we in control of these changes?

Museums Australia's Visual Arts/Craft Special Interest Group reformed in 1998 with the intention of reinvigorating this vital, if slightly sagging, branch of the museum 'tree'. When asked if we'd like to guest-edit a component of this issue of *Museum National*, the SIG decided the opportunity would provide a perfect vehicle for showing the broader museum community just how much those of us working in the creative sector have in common!

With mutual enlightenment in mind, we've gathered together a group of busy individuals and asked them to comment on a particular aspect of managing change, from the perspective of their professional positions. The results, we hope you'll agree, are varied, vibrant and, in one case, slightly vexed.

Our story launches out with a crafty complaint from Noel Frankham, former general manager of Object-Centre for Contemporary Craft in Sydney and recently appointed professor and head of South Australia's School of Art. Noel's plea to do away with the word 'craft' altogether was originally made at this year's Museums Australia national conference in Albury and sets an appropriately revolutionary tone for what is to follow.

Clare Williamson, curator of special exhibitions at the State Library of Victoria, also gave a paper at the Albury conference about the tribulations and jubilations of job transition. Her story is both amusing and highly instructive for anyone teetering hesitantly on the brink of a big move elsewhere.

Yet more angles on how our current relationships are changing come from Andrew Seward and Michael Beckman. Andrew co-manages the suitably named Platform artist-run space in Melbourne, renowned as a 24-hour arena for political and artistic agitation. He shares some valuable insights into the notion of alternative exhibition spaces. By contrast, Michael's perspective as education officer at Queensland Art Gallery is channelled through thousands of pairs of smaller eyes, as he enlightens us about some of the innovative programming being designed for children at QAG.

Close on the heels of change come two case studies from regional centres, one from the director of the new-look cultural mecca of Bendigo Art Gallery in Victoria, the other from Joe Eisenberg and Belinda Cotton from New England Regional Art Museum in Armidale, NSW. Both profiles look at how regional institutions can work creatively to reinvigorate their collections and reposition their identity within the local and broader community.

In collating this rich assortment from the visual arts and craft community, I must acknowledge one important absence: indigenous art. Several attempts were made to bring in an article that would aptly sum up recent changes and issues in Aboriginal art. After much discussion, it was decided that we had far too many significant question marks and inviting gaps in our written results. Rather than publish a list of half-answered queries, we've decided to hold the topic over for a future issue, allowing us more time to pan some 'real gold' from the 'fool's' brands circulating out there in the popular media at present.

Anna Clabburn is a freelance writer and secretary of the Visual Arts/Craft Special Interest Group of Museums Australia.

The Visual Arts/Crafts SIG held formal elections for committee members at the Museums Australia conference in Albury. Members are: Chairperson—Jane Scott; Treasurer—Kirsty Grant; Secretary—Anna Clabburn; Newsletter—Annette Welkamp; Membership—Jude Savage. Ordinary members: Jason Smith, Belinda Cotton, Tony Ellwood, Susie Attiwell, Anne Kirker, Tracy Judd, Noel Frankham, Andrew Seward.

At the AGM, members discussed current issues and urged the new committee to investigate and, if possible, undertake production of a newsletter, development of a website attached to a MA site, and investigate possible collaborations with the Regional Galleries SIG. Members voted unanimously to increase the SIG's membership fee to $10.

The new committee will meet in Melbourne on 19 August.

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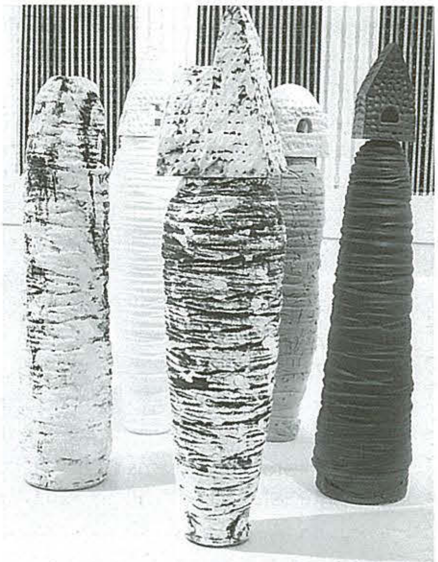
Crafting a Positive Outlook

NOEL FRANKHAM

This article derives from a brief paper Noel Frankham presented at Museums Australia's national conference in Albury this year. His plea to move beyond rigid definitions of 'craft' acknowledges the need to find fresh ways of talking about creative work across the gamut of contemporary practice.



Neville Moneer Assad-Salha *Mixed marriage no. 2* ceramic, 1500 x 200mm. From the exhibition *Turn the Soil* 1998. Photo: Sonny Vandeveld.

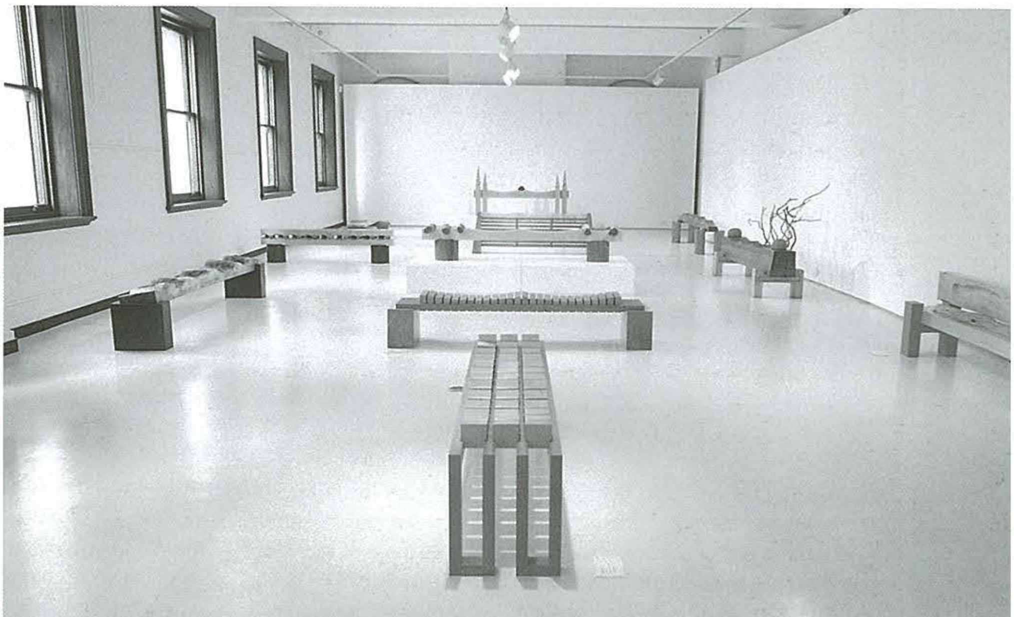
To give this short comment some potency, I have taken the liberty of using selective memory and exaggeration to make my points. Therefore, apologies to those whose knowledge encourages them to see more complex considerations within the debate!

My criticism about the appropriateness of the crafts sector's political strategy can be taken as a metaphor for the position of contemporary art in art museums, regional galleries within the general museum environment, and visual arts within the overall arts sector.

While the 1970's craft movement recognised the creative potential of practice and celebrated the achievements of various craft media, its political strategy relied on establishing craft's 'difference' from art. Craft needed its own clear identity. The campaign to establish a Crafts Board at the Australia Council reflected this separatist view. Recognising the overwhelming dominance of painting and sculpture, and the risks of funding opportunities disappearing into the high-art mainstream, it was considered essential that 'craft' appear quite different from 'art'. Emphasising those differences, advocates tended to base their case on technical skill, materiality, functionality, decoration and the traditions of craft, thereby reinvigorating the late nineteenth century debate (about aesthetics versus function). Like its predecessor, the 1970's craft movement linked practice to alternative lifestyle, promoting a simpler, healthier existence that maintained 'oneness' with materials and making.

In a sense this strategy set in train patterns of operating that have described the craft debate since. While polarising the practices worked well enough to see the establishment of both a Crafts Board and Craft Australia, many artists were left on the edge. At one end, some hobby and recreation-based practices and more artisan crafts swelled the numbers. Sculptors who used clay, artists who worked with attention to materials and processes, but did not produce functional objects, and those who referenced women's issues were often also included under the craft banner.

With such a broad practice, craft became a term to describe bad art, a way of denying ideas and of celebrating the amateur. Ironically, an effort to celebrate all the good that craft connotes became subordinate to concerns that craft was a dogmatic cause unrelated to the key aspects of art (that is, art in the broad sense). As such, with craft isolated from the rest of visual culture, it became increasingly difficult to justify its support within the realms of professional arts practice. So the strategies for ensuring a profile, recognition and identity eventually became a risk for craft. The stalwarts still fight the fight, but younger, less ideologically consumed artists generally see little relevance in craft characterised by



Object galleries installation of Peter Adams' *Earth Links*, 1998. Photo Sonny Vandeveld.

the past, and apparently (perhaps) without a future.

The strategic focus on lifestyle and preservation of practice has tended to ignore the opportunities of contemporary technology, artists who work across media areas, and, most importantly, to deny craft's professionalism and conceptual strength. Somewhere in all of this sits the move of art schools into universities (with the related and profound structural changes that have come with this) and the impact of the Australia Council's changes in 1987 and 1994.

While the issues still point to survival, new strategies are needed. With relatively strong TAFE sector art and craft courses in most states, and the numerous pressures afflicting university art schools, it is imperative that craft leads with its conceptual strength. Without a basis in ideas, there is little argument to maintain university craft courses and subject areas. Likewise, there is no need to see issues of technique as the exclusive province of craft, or research and scholarship as that of art. Each is essential to the other, particularly within the university sector.

These issues are similar to those of the country's funding agencies. Success in developing professionalism over the past twenty years necessitates craft's role as part of a broad and vibrant visual cultural practice. Media-based art and craft separations are problematic, especially in the context of greatly increased professionalism in visual arts training and practice, rapid development of regional and state galleries and the move towards university art schools.

Having been an art student during the 1970s and directly involved with the 'craft debate' while at the Queensland Art Gallery and the Australia Council, I was still somewhat surprised by the importance of the separatist argument when I started to develop the strategies for Object at Customs House. Confronted with stakeholders outside the arts world, it was made very clear to me that the wider community was wholly unimpressed by the debate and that, when pushed, most people saw it as indulgent semantics.

Committed to developing the Customs House venue, we were obliged to repackage our organisation by avoiding overt references to craft, repositioning ourselves as a team player prepared to contribute significant benefit to community initiatives. It was interesting that during negotiations over the $1.5 million Object Studios development, we had to change tack quickly when it became clear that craft would not get a guernsey, whereas a jewellery studio won immediate support. Rather than reflect on the wisdom of political strategies, some of my industry colleagues were horrified that we had to make concessions to business people, developers and bureaucrats who 'should have known better', known how important craft was!

I had a similar experience with the city council's Customs House Implementation Committee. I was a regular attendee at their Friday meetings. I'd arrive, presenting energy and optimism, certain that we had the ideal activity for Customs House. I knew that the members were receptive, but I couldn't quite convince them. It was only after I'd established some friendships among the decision-makers that it became clear that the committee (made up of ten excellent and committed individuals) just didn't see how contemporary craft was worth the investment and opportunity that Customs House represented. They didn't know what craft was, partly because they were influenced by the seventies hangover, but also because they hadn't been exposed to the very shows we were advocating. We finally won them over by tabling a pile of great catalogues for shows that hadn't visited Sydney because it didn't have an appropriately large and craft-interested venue. We didn't present them as craft shows; if we had to define, we referred to design and artists.

In addition to questioning the long-term benefit of the Crafts Movement, frankly, I began to wonder if some in the crafts sector actually wanted craft to succeed. There seemed to be such an ingrained culture of defeat that loss and denial were expected, and even preferred. To have the City of Sydney, NSW Ministry for the Arts and the Australia Council say 'no' to requests for funding was evidence that craft was undervalued and ignored, proof that they were right all along! The craft community was the hardest to convince. As it transpired, we secured over $1.3 million towards the studios and much the same to establish the Customs House venue. The lease deal negotiated for Customs House is worth an estimated $5 million more from the city council and NSW Ministry for the Arts over the ten year term.

In our current economic climate these amounts do not describe hesitation about the quality and potential of craft. But I certainly had to reconsider the effectiveness of nomenclature, marketing and notions of exclusivity. It is much smarter to be identified as part of a solution than part of a problem; we had to pitch as positive, competent, determined and committed to collective success. I am more determined than I could have ever expected to be of the need to dump 'craft' as a noun. Its value is as a verb that describes an approach to practice, a quality that can and should be found across the visual arts and design.

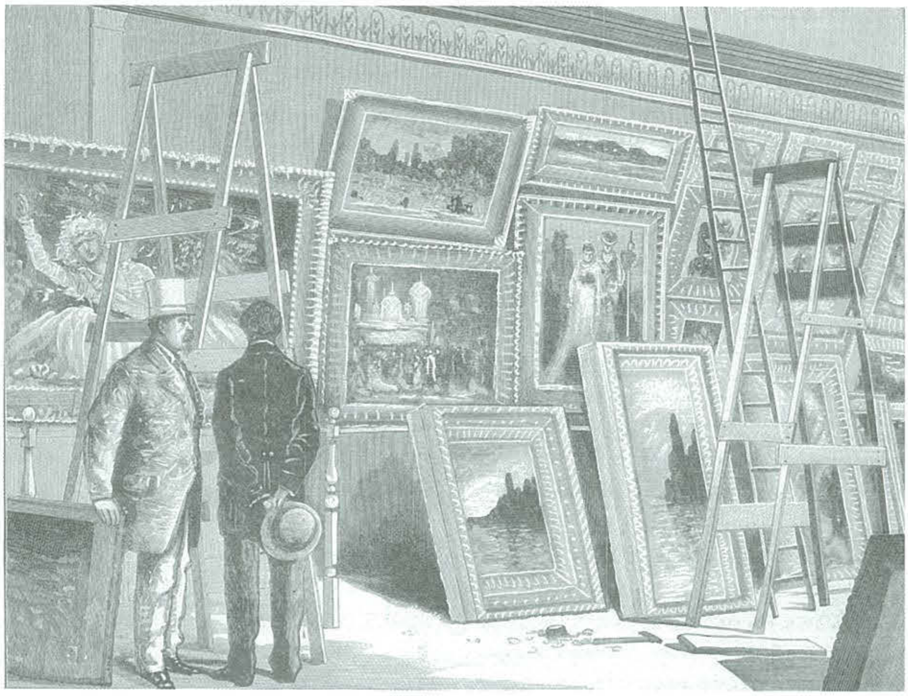
I don't see a future for craft portrayed as an 'other', a worthy but disregarded outsider. In my direct and recent experience, the system can readily be made to work for craft, but it takes strategic planning, preparedness to contribute constructively, to be flexible and to engage rather than stay on the edge carping about losses.

Noel Frankham is professor and head of the South Australian School of Art. He is the former general manager of Object – Centre for Contemporary Craft in Sydney.

The Same – But Different
Job entry and transition within the curatorial profession

CLARE WILLIAMSON

At the recent Museums Australia conference in Albury, I was invited to present this paper as part of the Visual Arts/Craft Special Interest Group's sessions on professional issues in the arts. I must warn readers that this paper is unashamedly personal. But if my case can be taken as Exhibit A, perhaps it can provide an opportunity to consider broader issues relating to the curatorial profession as a whole.



The Melbourne International Exhibition: Arranging Pictures in the Fine Arts Gallery, 1880. Wood engraving from *The Australasian Sketcher*, 11 September 1880. Courtesy of the La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Getting a Job

In the fifteen years that I have been working as a curator, the profession has changed dramatically in terms of the duties involved and the requirements for entry. In 1984 I began my first full-time job in the arts, as assistant curator (of everything) at the Queensland Art Gallery. I had a pass degree in arts with a double major in art history, librarianship qualifications, had worked part-time as a student at the University of Queensland Art Museum and was convinced I knew everything. After all, I'd studied art history, surely I knew how to be a curator. How wrong I was. Fifteen years later, in 1999, a would-be assistant curator (whether of everything or something) seems to need at least a masters degree, museum studies, experience and connections. I was one of the lucky ones.

Museum studies courses have expanded enormously over recent times, but the jobs haven't. As a profession, we need to be looking at what we can do to assist new graduates to get that all-important first foot in the door. I'm not just being magnanimous here. For our profession to stay dynamic and healthy, we need to be regularly injecting the industry with new blood. Internships provide an invaluable opportunity, although they can be difficult to accommodate.

It is exciting and all-too-rare when new positions are created in the arts. My current position as curator of special exhibitions at the State Library of Victoria did not exist prior to December 1998, nor did the Library's position of exhibitions project manager. Such new opportunities open up a progression of vacancies as people move within the arts to take up these positions, thereby creating new vacancies behind them. In my case, a classic case of musical chairs ensued across Melbourne. I left my job as curator at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) to take up the job at the Library, Stuart Koop left his job at the Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP) to go to ACCA, Charlotte Day left 200 Gertrude Street to go to the CCP, and Max Delany left the Museum of Modern Art at Heide to go to 200 Gertrude Street.

To expand the context of this paper, I decided to hunt around the magnificent old stacks of the State Library of Victoria to find some examples of what was needed to get a job as a curator 100 years ago. I came across a biography of Laurence Binyon, the poet, Asian art scholar and curator at the British Art Museum for over 40 years.(1) Binyon was one of five sons of an Anglican clergyman. Money was tight but Binyon won scholarships to the school at St Paul's in London and then to Oxford University. Soon after graduating, he applied for a vacancy in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum.

It is interesting to read extracts from his references, written by two of his Oxford professors, to understand the selection criteria for a good curator in the 1890s and to compare this with the 1990s. One called Binyon 'a born poet and artist', adding: 'if I were appointing to a post of this kind I should as soon think of rejecting Pallas Athene, if she presented herself in a recognisable shape, as of not taking a man of Mr Binyon's gifts'. As Binyon's biographer points out, Athene wouldn't have had much chance: women were not employed as anything other than charwomen, housemaids and 'Ladies Attendants' until the manpower shortage of World War One.

Binyon's other referee stressed his real enthusiasm and natural turn for art: 'I have been served several portrait heads by him, which besides the knack of catching a likeness, show a feeling for drawing and modelling, which – if he should never make any other use of it – seem to warrant that he would have a trustworthy discrimination of the work of others'.

I also found it interesting to compare the typical working day of Binyon with our frenetic existence today. Binyon wrote: '...I am fairly happy, and don't overwork myself. In the intervals between conversation with one's colleagues, taking exercise (it's nearly a quarter of a mile from my place to the Catalogue), and playing with the black cat, it is possible to catalogue from twenty to thirty books a day. This allows for reading those that are of interest.'

While time was generous, wages were not, and most employees were expected to have private means of support, as Binyon described: 'In those days Museum salaries in the junior ranks approached but did not exceed the earnings of a rather unsuccessful organ-grinder. Indeed, Mr Gladstone had pronounced that our work was so agreeable that we ought not to be paid at all.'

I leap now to the 1960s, when UNESCO published its manual, *The Organisation of Museums: Practical Advice*. In its section on staff, it states: 'Whatever the size of the museum in his (sic) charge, the director, the curator or the keeper should be regarded as at least the equivalent of a secondary school specialist teacher. He should thus approach his chosen profession with not less than the educational qualifications of a graduate from a teacher-training college, and if he is in addition a graduate from a university, so much the better.'

Looking at this changing picture, I would surmise that entry into the profession was originally rather elitist. Expectations about independent means of support and privileged education were opened up through the 1960s to the early 1980s, with the rise in galleries and museums and free tertiary education. However, since then, the profession has

The definition of a curator depends on the nature and size of the institution, and the role of the art work or image within it.

tended dangerously toward elitism once more, this time due to the increased costs of education and the greater requirements for entry at a junior level.

Staying Put or Opting for Change

The decision to remain in one position in one organisation or to move within the profession is largely a personal choice and one for which there are no hard and fast rules. To a certain extent, the arts professions reflect recent universal trends in which flexibility, mobility and multiskilling are the buzzwords. What differs, however, is a lack of opportunity, as the arts industry in this country is so small that people often stay put for lack of choice. A lengthy period at one institution can lead to invaluable specialist knowledge of that organisation and its collections, but can also make it very difficult to move on later in one's career.

Being a curator can mean many different things. I think I am of the move-sideways-around-the-profession-to-have-as-diverse-an-experience-as-possible variety. The definition of a curator depends on the nature and size of the institution, and the role of the art work or image within it.

For eight years I worked in a range of curatorial positions at the Queensland Art Gallery. At a state gallery, the role of curator included caring for collections, organising exhibitions, recommending acquisitions, undertaking research, cataloguing works and writing for publication. For me this was a critical period in my professional development. I discovered my passion for photography and began to realise that my interests in the image were largely related to the social contexts of their production and extended well beyond the frame.

From there I went to ACCA and worked for six years as curator. I found the definition of curator at a contemporary art space was completely different. There was still responsibility for research and presentation of exhibitions, but there was no collection. My role was to facilitate the creation of new work through collaborations with artists. The position was to a great extent a co-ordinator's one and included being a negotiator, a fundraiser, an education officer, a publicist and an audiovisual technician. I even improved my skills as a plasterer. At times I organised group exhibitions with a social or issues-based framework, such as 'Seven Histories of Australia'. However, it was not always appropriate to apply these sorts of readings to contemporary art practice.

Therefore, when a position came up at the State Library of Victoria, I felt I'd struck gold. The Library has large and significant collections of photography, paintings, drawings, and engravings. Every image has been collected primarily for its social context, for what it says about an aspect of life in Victoria or the depiction of its places. Again, the definition of curator is very different. While I am once more working with collections, it is other staff members who are responsible for their acquisition and care. The preparation of major exhibitions (currently in preparation for new galleries in the Library's major redevelopment program) involves a high degree of collaboration within the organisation. I am privileged to work with a range of staff who have highly specialist knowledge of the Library's holdings and skills in appropriate treatments.

For me, my transition wasn't so much a move *away* from contemporary art, as a move to the particular opportunities of working with the Library and its collections. Some see my shift from a contemporary art space to a state library as a huge leap. In some ways it is, but in others, it's not. The past decade or so has seen a merging of the functions of images across artistic, social, popular and commercial frameworks. At the same time the functions of institutions have overlapped. Museums now commission artists and host residencies. Commercial galleries present site-specific and non-commercial installations. Art galleries present projects that explore social issues. And libraries now build galleries and employ curators. Audiences are going to them all.

It's all the same – but different.

Clare Williamson is curator of special exhibitions at the State Library of Victoria.

References

1 All references and quotations regarding Laurence Binyon have been drawn from Hutcher, John 1995, *Laurence Binyon: poet, scholar of East and West*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Alternative Spaces – what are they these days?

ANDREW SEWARD

Space is a contingent and shifting idea. Varieties of public, personal, electronic, natural and built space overlap and collide in endlessly complex ways. In the art world an 'alternative space' might be characterised as a type of niche that is discovered in the framework of various institutions and conventions.

Alternative spaces are quite diverse and reflect the imaginations of the people involved, and the times and circumstances they find themselves in. As in real estate, location is important: in Melbourne, Platform makes use of disused advertising display cases in city railway stations; City Lights consists of a series of large light boxes strategically placed to exhibit two-dimensional transparent work.

Ryszard Dabek, *digital photograph*, 1998. From the exhibition Home, in which points of access and views in a conventional suburban dwelling were erased, Platform, May 1998.

Platform is an artist-run exhibition space based in two of Melbourne's inner city subway underpasses. Its genesis came about when two local artists (myself and friend Richard Holt) observed how much public advertising space was left dormant around the city and decided to approach the local council about placing artworks in these locations. After several years of development, the spaces are now funded regularly by the Australia Council and provide some of the rawest edges of contemporary art to audiences, 24 hours a day. In concert with Melbourne's other public spaces in street windows and bus shelters, Platform considers itself an important forum for artists seeking to show a range of new work.

Other artist-run spaces in Melbourne, such as West Space, and Talk – Artists Initiative, are also characterised by innovative administrative structures which are dedicated to the exhibition and promotion of art work, often showing images and objects specifically related to the exhibition spaces themselves. Other project-based spaces, such as the Museum of Dirt, located briefly in a derelict inner city terrace, are designed to be ephemeral spaces of activity, while artists' zines such as *Glue* and *Artfan* open up other types of spaces and audiences from the printed page. Increasingly, the Internet also offers a range of possibilities for activities such as online magazines, net-galleries and various interactivity for showcasing work to a potentially large and unknown audience.

Opportunities for alternative spaces will always arise because of the constant shifting of positions of taste, economics, politics and personalities within a given location over time. The longevity or impact of any such space is related to the depth of the niche being occupied in the broader art scene. As in most things, the net result is a combination of timing, luck, support and willpower.

Biological analogies of plants flourishing in vacant lots in urban areas, or of trout living in the eddies of a big river, come to mind as some of the most apt illustrations of what alternative spaces are these days. Ironically, if an alternative space is characterised by its location in an existing framework, it follows that it cannot be correctly defined as existing outside the mainstream system in any sense. Moreover, the identity and activity of an alternative space are often defined by their relationship with the identity and activity of other types of spaces. To speak of any type of space as being somehow external is therefore self-contradictory.

The slippage between alternative and outside can be seen as a legacy of recent decades during which radicalism was a valued notion in art. In the 1970s, for instance, people used to talk about making changes to social or institutional structures by adopting a covert position from within – sort of like a secret agent or a spy. Such a notion seems foreign today because we understand that culture is not monolithic and homogeneous. Furthermore, control over the enormous frameworks that shape a particular culture is not solely in the hands of one person or group.

It is precisely this lack of centralised control in today's culture that gives the impression of alternative spaces rising unbidden and autonomously. Ironically, this process of decentralisation is also what contributes to the sense that such spaces operate outside convention and existing networks. However, in my experience of running Platform I have found that structures and ideologies are affected through much more integrated and collaborative processes.

In the art world the job of finding a niche in an existing system and maintaining that spot usually falls to people who have nothing to lose and therefore the most to gain from the venture. Often, the initiators are young people with a taste for experimentation, both in a personal and broader artistic sense. However, I also imagine more established artists or a museum curator with a particular interest could easily establish a future alternative space.

It should be remembered that the shifting relationships between marginal activity and the mainstream defines a lot of what we call innovation and progress in any particular professional field. Yet the more things change, the more they stay the same. In Australia, the Heidelberg school consisted of a group of artists who created a figuratively alternative space within the structures of the art world of their day. Similarly, in the late 1930s the Australian Contemporary Art Society's stated aims included a goal promote the free development of art unhampered by any denomination and to stimulate public interest in a living art, thereby encouraging the development of patronage for contemporary work. It's startling to note the congruity between these aims and those of many alternative spaces today.

By their nature, alternative venues for art follow a cycle of creation, assimilation and absorption; and yet they are seldom just stepping stones to brighter careers elsewhere in a state or a commercial gallery. Rather than bunkers of adversary, such spaces can be thought of as the research and development arm of general art practices. They help keep dialogue within the community fresh, and perhaps even suggest future pathways for established organisations

Alternative spaces can represent strong agents for, and indicators of, change. Town planners speak of creating green corridors in urban centres to keep the built environment oxygenated. So how might future cultural planners provide structures to enable alternative spaces to flourish, thereby assuring a renewable source of creative oxygen in our cities' hearts?

Andrew Seward is co-manager of Melbourne's Platform artist-run spaces.

Changing Perspective: Children's Exhibitions at the Queensland Art Gallery

MICHAEL BECKMAN

The donation box was once a favourite exhibit for young children visiting the Queensland Art Gallery. It had everything children wanted in a museum or gallery exhibit: an interactive element (they liked to donate 'pretend' money, such as bus tickets); subject matter they could relate to ('it's a gigantic glass money box!'); a lower than usual viewing height (they could steam up the glass with their breath); and they were allowed to touch it (because it wasn't an art work!).

Equally popular 'exhibits' included the elevator buttons, emergency exit doors, escalators and thermohygrographs.

In 1998, staff observations that kids sometimes seemed to enjoy these 'exhibits' more than those they were intended to look at was put to good use. For the first time, we introduced an innovative program of children's exhibitions designed to invest real art objects with the irresistible appeal the unintentional 'exhibits' seemed to possess.

In the exhibition Portraits are People Pictures, small portraits were presented behind little doors which, when opened, activated an electronic sound recording.

The new program consists of two exhibitions per year, each comprising art works, interactive displays, explanatory labels, activity books, guided tours and art-making activities for age groups ranging from pre-school to upper-primary (3–12 years).

Aiming exhibitions at children requires major changes to the traditional exhibition format. Most children have limited experience of imposing architecture and can easily lose focus in a large space so careful consideration is given to the physical dimensions and layout of the display. We remodel the exhibition spaces by hanging art works at a lower than usual height (or constructing a raised floor), walls are painted in distinct colours, and explanatory labels are written in simple language and large font size to allow easy reading. The art works themselves are usually displayed behind perspex or glass to ensure their safety and to minimise the need for supervision.

Many of the interactive displays within each exhibition focus on stimulating children's interest and enjoyment while enhancing their understanding of the art works. In the first of the two exhibitions held to date, 'Portraits are People Pictures' (25 July – 4 October 1998), we displayed two portraits with distorted heads alongside a trick mirror so that children could experiment with the visual effect of contortion on their own faces.

The exhibition explored the history, styles and techniques of portraiture through a range of art works, all carefully selected to appeal to children. Portraits with suits, cigars and brandy glasses were avoided. Instead, many of the art works showed children, or were physically interesting, so as to attract children's attention.

An underlying aim of this program is to teach children how to look at works of art, and that this process can be enjoyable. Specific interactive features introduce kids to a process that invites concentrated observation and rewards closer looking with increased understanding. In 'Portraits are People Pictures', small portraits were presented behind little doors. Each of the doors, when opened, activated an electronic sound recording: if the portrait depicted a person asleep, the child heard snoring. Another interactive display encouraged children to create a silhouette portrait by casting their shadow onto a translucent screen set in an oval frame. The only form of instruction provided was a set of Georgian silhouette portraits in oval frames displayed nearby. Children simply looked at the art works and then experimented with the interactive until a similar image appeared. This process usually entailed consultation with friends, teachers or parents and repeated viewing of the art works.

An additional benefit of this type of installation is an increase in children's control of the viewing experience and increased time spent at each exhibit. Children like to explore art exhibitions through smell, taste, touch and climbing over their new environment. They sometimes feel compelled to test an exhibit's resilience to physical force. The various elements within our children's exhibitions are designed to stimulate the senses and encourage playful investigation, yet still resist destruction.

The various elements within our children's exhibitions are designed to stimulate the senses and encourage playful investigation, yet still resist destruction.

We've also learnt that children often prefer not to read instructions or labels. While our explanatory labels are still predominantly read aloud to kids by accompanying adults, the interactives and displays are designed so that a minimum of written instruction is necessary. In our second exhibition, 'Scary Monsters' (28 November 1998 – 7 February 1999), gigantic footprints on the floor showed children where to go, with far more impact than words could ever achieve. This project featured a diverse range of mythical monsters and demons from different cultures, as well as many imaginative and inventive images by contemporary artists interested in the theme. The space looked like a carnival ghost train ride: rubber bats and spiders were suspended from the ceiling, art works were shown in cages and behind a graveyard fence.

The exhibition also allowed for some unusual and entertaining juxtapositions: in one area a 1908 sketch of bush flies by Hans Heysen was displayed adjacent to a cane toad, preserved and decorated by contemporary Queensland artist Luke Roberts. It's highly likely that this unconventional hang is the only occasion on which these two artists have ever been exhibited together. However, the museological significance of the event largely escaped the notice of the target audience (who were all too keenly preoccupied with determining which work was the scariest!)

Michael Beckman is education officer at the Queensland Art Gallery.

Queensland Art Gallery's next children's project will form part of The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (9 September 1999 – 26 January 2000). 'Kid's APT' will feature children's art activities and displays designed by adult participants in the APT.

Re-interpretation in a regional setting – Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria

TONY ELLWOOD

***Ad delectationem Populi per Artem Pulchram* – For the delight/edification of the people through beautiful art.** *(Bendigo Art Gallery motto)*

Founded in 1887, the Bendigo Art Gallery is one of the oldest public art institutions in the country. Wealth from the goldfields enabled the community to acquire works of art from Australia and Europe but, unlike other regional cities, the acquisition emphasis was on collecting narratives which were characteristically sombre and/or moralistic, and primarily from Britain. In retrospect, this catalyst has generated a rich and insightful account of conservative Victorian taste. Unlike many state galleries, regional galleries seldom have the resources to alter their original collecting patterns. This leaves the audience with a valuable record of aesthetic vision and taste from the past. Over the last century, the gallery has endeavoured to build on its ambitious and intriguing core collection. It has amassed an extensive representation of twentieth century Australian art which is broadly focused to include holdings in painting, work on paper, sculpture and decorative arts.

Bendigo Art Gallery's contemporary Australian art gallery. Photo John Gollings.

Although the collection was always maintained with great care, the building began to reach bursting point such that, by the 1960s, entire decades of the permanent collection could no longer be displayed. This was partly remedied in 1962, with a modernist 'selkirk textured brick' extension providing two new floors of narrow galleries. However, this hard-edged structure proved difficult for viewing art and made access difficult. In short, the building still did not meet the needs of a museum in the 1990s.

Up until 1996 the gallery was structured as a company, overseen by a committee of management. Unfortunately, this independent relationship hindered growth and municipal support. After local government amalgamation, the committee and the City of Greater Bendigo developed a new partnership that saw the gallery become a business unit of the city. The committee has maintained authority in overseeing policy, acquisitions and the permanent collection, while the staff are professionally accountable to the City of Greater Bendigo, in return for use of its extensive resources. The gallery has benefited greatly from this new relationship, receiving some $4 million in resources towards capital works.

More recently, following the acquisition of an adjoining block of land, the gallery has re-configured its permanent and temporary collections. The new hang commences emphatically with a post-1980 collection of Australian art, offering a view through to the nineteenth century rooms. Beginning a visit with contemporary art validates an aspect of the collection that was frequently overshadowed in the past by the strength of the gallery's historical collection. It also demonstrates the gallery's democratic approach to collecting. The logical flow, of 20th century art to the historical holdings, works well with viewers who enjoy observing the diverse nature of the art works within the varied architecture of the old and new gallery sections, which are designed to comply with current international museum standards.

A vital part of repositioning the gallery was a commitment to audience knowledge and development. Each month during the capital works process we surveyed visitors with random exit polls, keeping the gallery open to the public throughout the period of change. Close to two hundred people gave opinions about temporary exhibition programming, the permanent collection and marketing, providing invaluable information about all aspects of our work. When we began formal interpretation of our permanent collection, visitors were invited to respond to the extended text labels, display configurations and the overall quality of the display.

We also upgraded membership benefits and related printed material, and re-designed public programs to attract people who had not previously visited the gallery. Corporate sponsorship programs have also been introduced, enabling greater networking with the local community.

The gallery is developing its own exhibitions and continues to select travelling exhibitions to complement its core schedule and audience interests. This selective approach has helped increase our attendance figures, with many peak periods in the year regularly averaging a 60 per cent metropolitan visitation.

A sustained stream of collection and temporary exhibitions has resulted in the Bendigo Art Gallery being a buoyant and successful resource for the community. To consolidate internal changes, the gallery works hard to demonstrate its commitment to the broader regional network, primarily through extensive exhibition touring, public workshops, and educational and professional development in the region. Having increased our attendances over the last four years from 17,000 to 70,000, we are now ready to embark on an additional redevelopment program which will focus on the permanent collection and the venue's original commitment to generate 'delight' for all involved.

Tony Ellwood is director of the Bendigo Art Gallery.

Perfect Match: Collecting Collectors – New England Regional Art Museum

JOSEPH EISENBERG AND BELINDA COTTON

Like the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, the New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM) must raise 75 per cent of its operating budget each year. This leaves very little room for purchasing works for the museum's collection, aside from the occasional funding injection from an Australia Council or NSW Ministry for the Arts grant.

NERAM currently houses four – soon to be five – collections. Together they comprise over 4000 works of art representing the span of 20th century Australian art. Naturally, each collection requires conservation, careful management and development through acquisition.

Over time, it became apparent to us that we needed to do some lateral thinking to devise alternative methods of facilitating acquisition. The solution was to shift NERAM's focus sideways, from collecting works of art to the art of collecting collectors!

Using a Collection/Acquisition Policy to Build a Collection

When director Joseph Eisenberg first came to NERAM in 1983, the collection policy was a replica of the National Gallery of Australia's policy, designed to collect in many different areas across a range of media. In our regional gallery context, with unique and significant collections already in place, we realised it seemed overly ambitious to continue this model of collecting 'everything'.

Our first step was to set up an Art Management Committee, comprising practising artists and two professional staff members to act as advisers and researchers. The committee developed a policy to augment the existing strengths of two of our key collections – the Howard Hinton and Chandler Coventry collections (together covering Australian art from the 1880s to the 1960s).

The committee continues to actively inform discussion, debate, quality control and collection development. Consequently, our collections change and develop according to opportunity, as does the policy of collecting. For example, in 1993 the National Gallery of Australia's (NGA) exhibition, 'Flash Pictures by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists' was shown at NERAM. The exhibition's curator, Daphne Wallace, met with NERAM's Art Management Committee to discuss the collection policy and the acquisition of indigenous art. The committee subsequently decided that indigenous art should not be marginalised but viewed holistically as part of the core collection, particularly in respect to other contemporary holdings. NERAM's collection policy was amended to incorporate this new perspective.

Strategies for Collecting Collectors

NERAM's approach to collecting collectors is based on seeking out people with whom we can develop long-term relationships of benefaction. In targeting collectors of indigenous art, for instance, NERAM was introduced, through Hogarth Galleries, to a collector wanting to donate a collection to a significant institution. Through this contact over 60 barks, canvasses and carvings came to Armidale.

In another case, a fan of James Gleeson's work heard about the director's love of the artist's work and followed us up. Thus began a long history of donations to the NERAM collections, which has included works by James Gleeson, Jean Bellette, James Cant, Nancy Borlase and Harald Vike.

Collecting Dilemmas – Is Less More?

At what point do you say 'no' to your donors? And how do you say 'no' without losing them? This is where NERAM's personal approach becomes vital. It is important that the museum's benefactors feel part of its life and projects, so much of our energy is invested in looking after their interests. This goes well beyond the usual lunches and dinners to the realm of creative friendships.

This in turn creates a number of issues. Firstly, our storage space is finite. In the last two years NERAM has acquired over 500 works. At the moment our facilities are adequate, but this current rate of growth will have significant impact on our future capacity if it continues. Secondly, there's the issue of quality. It is never worth compromising on this for the sake of keeping a donor. In our case, we say no to donors by demonstrating how the proposed gift does not meet our policy specifications.

Donors – Playing for Keeps or a One Night Stand?

NERAM's long-term donors are usually collectors who, for various reasons, become committed partners in our collection policy. Some have never been to Armidale, nor do they necessarily intend to! Keeping in touch with these donors allows us to draw on their assistance when a work becomes available for purchase but for which we do not have funds.

It has long been part of NERAM's policy to take care of the transport arrangements and any other costs (including valuations and conservation) for donated works, partly to alleviate any further imposition on the donor. As a courtesy, personal acknowledgment is always conveyed to the donors from the trustees and professional staff. Their generosity is also acknowledged whenever and wherever the work is on public exhibition.

NERAM hopes to keep its future relationships with donors fluid and flexible. We will continue collecting collectors and, hopefully, keep them too!

Joseph Eisenberg is director and Belinda Cotton is deputy director of the New England Regional Art Museum.

FRINGE BENEFITS: COMMUNITY, CULTURE, COMMUNICATION

Fifth Annual Conference of Museums Australia

Members of Museums Australia met in Albury in May to attend the association's fifth annual conference and its first regional conference. A host of international and national speakers discussed community, culture and communications and their impact on museum workers in Australia and overseas, particularly those in regional centres. The four-day program included sessions based around community, colleagues and collections; developing collections; audience; and cultural planning. In this issue of *Museum National* we present two of the conference highlights, keynote papers presented by professor David Dolan, from Curtin University in Perth, and assistant professor Lois Silverman, from Indiana University in the USA. For details of conference proceedings, please see page 18.

Community v. Public Perceptions of Cultural Value

DAVID DOLAN

In any town or region, there are often discrepancies between what is most valued by the local community and what interests 'experts', the authorities, tourists, or other visitors from the wider public. It is worth mentioning that in addition to meaning the inclusive general body of the people, the word public also has a connotation of 'devoted or directed to the general good'. This preserves an older sense of public which is allied to citizenship: it referred to the politically and socially engaged component of the population. There is an echo of this older meaning in the title of this paper in which public is used to imply 'broadly informed' in contrast to narrower, sometimes parochial views.

Discrepancies between local communities' and others' heritage perceptions and values are obviously directly relevant to historic buildings or sites, and the museums that commonly occupy and interpret them. I argue that it can also apply to the display and interpretation of movable heritage – objects and collections in museums. Analysis of specific examples helps identify some of the differences between local and (inter)national frames of reference – differences which may have other important ramifications such as communication, management, funding, marketing and more. I also suggest that frames of reference, and thresholding techniques used in the identification and assessment of historic places under consideration for entry into registers of state heritage councils and similar organisations, may be more widely applicable and may help us find a 'third way' which is neither parochial nor nationalistic.

Identification of Heritage Value

The administration of heritage, in the sense of identification, legal protection and conservation of places of cultural significance, is in different parts of the world the business of various levels of government. In Australia, it is in the brief of all levels of government. While some municipalities are commendably active through their planning powers, others are not, and the strongest legal protection for heritage places is generally at the state level. This means in practice that a state-level organisation, such as a heritage council, must make decisions about places which are in most instances more familiar to the local communities where they are located. Decisions of state-level organisations usually take expressions of local opinion into account, and are usually made on the basis of first hand expert reports, but indeed members of the decision-making body will often not have seen or visited the places they list or register.

Heritage is always political and frequently controversial. Many controversies centre on discrepancies between a local community's valuations of a place and state-level 'expert' or official evaluations of it. Occasionally, the locals want to save something that is threatened and are frustrated if the state-level organisation considers it ineligible for protection under state legislation. More often, rural communities are puzzled or antagonised because the state-level organisation sees merit in a place locally held in low esteem. It is a matter of frames of reference.

For example, Cunderdin Airfield in Western Australia is at present of little interest to most people, but some military historians are fanatically devoted to it, seeing it as the last place in Australia retaining the ambience of the RAAF in World War Two. When it came up for con-

Whaleworld Museum, the Cheynes Beach Company's former whaling station near Albany, WA. While no-one disputes its significance, there are conflicting interpretations of its closure in 1978.

sideration for state heritage listing in 1996, the local government authority opposed the listing of what it saw as an asbestos-riddled, decrepit, incomplete, compromised, useless group of cheaply built, unattractive, uninteresting, transportable buildings occupying land which could be put to better use. This is a particular case of a common scenario.

In local eyes, something may be ordinary to the point of contempt. But, in national and/or specialist terms, the same place may be unique and priceless. The alleged rarity or uniqueness may be unknown to the locals and indeed to 99 per cent of the population because it relates to a special technical or historical frame of reference. Once the uniqueness or rarity of a place is made known to local communities, they often take great pride in it, but not always.

Not all disputes over heritage perceptions and values relate to identification: sometimes everyone agrees on the value of a place or a collection, while seeing it differently. No-one disputes that the Cheynes Beach Company's former whaling station near Albany, WA (now a museum called Whaleworld) is significant as the best preserved and the last operating whaling station on the Australian mainland, but there are conflicting interpretations of its closure in 1978. Popular belief is that it was forced to close by protesters expressing the force of public opinion. Some industrial historians argue that its closure was forced by economic pressures, the operation being unviable. This is not only a question of so-called historical fact, but a point of honour between conservationists and some locals, including former employees. Thus, when it comes to interpretation, there is potential for a dispute over whether or not the whaling station's non-operational state is a monument to successful Green action.

Disputes and discrepancies around differing heritage evaluations do not seem to focus on the categories of cultural heritage value used in any *Burra Charter*-based system of assessment – aesthetic, historic, scientific and social values – but more often on the indicators of degree of value: rarity and representativeness.

Parochialism in Museums

The question of identity in local museums is central to the issue of frames of reference. Local communities want to reflect their identity in the museums they control, which would seem compatible with the visitors' hopes that the museum will give them an introduction to the distinctive character of the locality. But in practice visitors are often frustrated to find that, wherever they are, the local museum contains the same predictable collections of under-interpreted and fast-deteriorating items.

For the purpose of the present argument, it is sufficient to suggest that local communities seem to locate their history in terms of their participation in the representative human experience (childhood, parenting, domesticity). In contrast, visitors, who may be tourists – and in tourism, differentiation of the destination is all-important – are more likely to want to understand the identity of the place in terms of its distinctive, rare or unique qualities. We have here both rarity and representativeness.

If many community museums are exercising the right to project their own conception of their own identity, this may simply reflect the fact that they are not really in the tourism business.[1] Regional venues which are unashamedly in the tourism business do stress regional distinctiveness, and even exaggerate it often to the point of what used to be called 'boosterism'.

At the other end are those institutions which claim to be national in a more plausible way, in that they are the creatures of national governments and are usually located in national capitals or other major population centres.

A cynic might suggest that they too are predictable, that just as local museums usually display items associated with individuals' typical rites of passage, major regional and national museums now almost invariably have extensive displays on immigration. There is no doubt that migration is worthy of prominent treatment, but what breeds cynicism is that these exhibitions are formulaic, as predictable in their own genre as the old tributes to imperial explorers and pioneers.

It is my contention here, that major regional and national museums also suffer from the community/identity problem familiar to us from local museums. It is also the national museum version of a problem identified in another field by John Docker, who wrote: 'because conventional Australian literary studies takes "the nation" as its object of study, its purview becomes almost inescapably nationalist; it seeks and desires a unitary narrative of progress'.[2]

In exploring the community/identity problem in major regional and national museums, again in terms of rarity and representativeness, we need not be distracted by former colonial art museums which took the name national in imitation of the national galleries of Europe.[3] This history is, however, linked indirectly to the main argument, and explains why it is appropriate to add 'major regional' to 'national' as above. Regions which are part of a political federation may have markedly different relationships to the whole: whereas some parts will want to present themselves as quintessentially typical, i.e. representative of the nation, others who see themselves as almost nations in their own right will want to emphasise their difference and individuality. For example, many Western Australians can be almost obsessively adamant that Western Australia is different from the rest of Australia, and see explication of that difference (or rarity) as the key regional cultural project.

Most national museums aim to address aspects of the human experience in terms of belonging to the relevant nation-state. They also at least partially justify their cost through their contribution to tourism. Similarly, much of the rhetoric of heritage identification and conservation is cast in terms of nationalistic sentiment, although much conservation is linked to and funded by cultural tourism. What is not always immediately obvious is the extent to which nationalistic sentiment – specifically nationalistic sentiment rather than regional experience – dominates the programs of many national museums.

At the Maritime Museum in Auckland, visitors could be forgiven for yawning at the news that a meta-theme of the displays is why Kiwis are so good at seafaring. Inevitably, their 1995 America's Cup victory is expansively celebrated. A comparable display in Te Papa is a motorbike mounted like an equestrian statue, apparently as a tribute to a local racing hero unlikely to be known to any overseas visitor. This sort of thing may go down well with the locals, but bores or embarrasses visitors into condescension.

While there is no time now to dissect Te Papa, that great squandered opportunity, it is fair to mention one of its worst and one of its best exhibitions, especially because the latter demonstrates that being interesting to the locals and informing the visitors need not be mutually exclusive alternatives. While 'Golden Days' the $2 million animated junkshop sells itself short by wallowing in sentimental cliches, 'Exhibiting Ourselves', curated by Dr Jock Phillips, is equally relevant to locals and visitors in its examination of how New Zealand has presented itself to the world through international exhibitions and expos.

It seems that Te Papa has made a specific political decision to give absolute priority to internal (i.e. national) issues in keeping with the government's social agenda. However, this excuse is not available to every national museum which goes beyond the presentation of aspects of the country's culture and falls into boosterism or a terminally boring regional version of political correctness. If we want to play the tourism card, as well as engendering national or regional or civic pride and the community's sense of its own identity, we must face the fact that simultaneously addressing both locals and visitors requires a carefully crafted approach. What then would be the components of such an approach?

Expressed in general terms, the answer is obvious: be aware of diversity, maintain a visitor focus and an awareness of who your visitors are, and develop exhibitions and other forms of interpretation of places and collections with a deliberate awareness that visitors are a varied lot. This means examining proposed themes, storylines, text and presentation with a conscious watch for jingoism, corny patriotism and aggressive nationalism.

Parochial and nationalistic overtones and biases can be invisible to those who share them, so carry this scrutiny into evaluations by including non-locals in focus groups and other visitor and non-visitor samples when testing audience responses. This is only an extension of the established principle of ensuring cultural diversity within samples of local residents.

In particular, be aware of normative assumptions. These are often embodied in the word 'community'. It is not new to say that we must be suspicious of the easy normative use of the term community. Ferdinand Tonnies warned that 'Community will reinforce and encapsulate a moral code, raising tensions and rendering heterodoxy a serious crime'.[4] Raymond Williams became suspicious when he noticed that 'community' is never used in a hostile sense. He saw that the term's apparent inclusiveness was predicated on exclusions.[5] But while this is not new, it is not often remembered or considered in museum circles.

Museums think of themselves, and promote and justify themselves, as community assets: serving the communities – local, regional or national – which own, fund and operate them. In one way this is good, but to give the best service to all the people who use museums, museum professionals should always remember to treat constructions of 'community' not as given and self-evident, but as subjects of scrutiny.

David Dolan is professor and director at the Research Institute for Cultural Heritage, Curtin University, Perth WA.

This is an abridged version of a paper delivered at Museums Australia's 1999 national conference Fringe Benefits, held in Albury in May.

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Meeting Human Needs: The Potential of Museums

LOIS H. SILVERMAN, PH.D

Introduction

Since my earliest experiences as a museum educator at a small historic site about fifteen years ago, two questions have always haunted me: How can museums make a difference in people's lives? How can museums help – individuals, communities, cultures?

Despite all the good work that goes on in museums, I continue to see stereotypic depictions in popular culture of museums as dusty, dull and boring, and I continue to hear call after call for museums to justify their importance and prove their relevance to their communities. What's wrong with this picture? We haven't realised the potential of museums. We haven't found the best ways to articulate the worth of museums. We haven't fully grasped the scope of what museums can do.

It wasn't very long ago that we learned how important it is to pay attention to what our visitors and our non-visitors are doing and saying. That lesson has already transformed museums. As we continue to watch and listen, and consider what we see and hear in light of what various scholars have said about human behaviour, communication and psychology, there are blueprints emerging for the future of museums.

I'd like to share one helpful set of blueprints – blueprints for meeting human needs: the potential of museums.

What are 'Human Needs'?

In reflecting on what visitors say and do in museums, and exploring theoretical and academic explanations of human action, one of the most useful perspectives I have found is the concept of needs – requirements or fulfilments that humans seek. Most useful is the theory of motivation presented by Abraham Maslow,[1] the father of humanistic psychology, who said that humans are driven by their desire to satisfy five different but sequential basic needs:

- physiological (hunger, thirst, sleep, basic survival);
- safety (security, freedom from fear and anxiety, protection against danger and threats);
- love and belongingness, or social (relationship, belonging and love, group association);
- ego/esteem (feelings of worth, strength, confidence, self-esteem; recognition, esteem from others, appreciation, status);
- self-actualisation (personal self-fulfilment; being creative, achieving maximum potential; be all that you can be).

When the first on the list is satisfied, we are free to be concerned with the next, and so on. A modicum of satisfaction is needed before one can be concerned with the next level.

The meeting of basic needs is fundamental to human health. Unmet needs contribute to neuroses, abnormal behaviour, maladjustment, psychopathology. From a more positive perspective, the meeting of basic needs is required for human creativity, achievement, contribution. The health of communities and societies is clearly informed by the meeting of individual basic needs.

Why Should Museum Workers Care About Human Needs?

Basically, human needs are likely to influence the desires, motivations and interpretations of visitors, as well as non-visitors. Therefore, human needs reflect areas of what I like to call 'experience objectives' that museum workers might aim to facilitate for visitors. The museum visit might therefore provide a range of benefits or positive outcomes for visitors.

For example, to fulfil learning and aesthetic needs, you might consciously choose to visit a museum because you perceive it to be a good place to meet those needs. The type of experiences you seek will also be shaped by your needs – you might seek out an art museum because of your aesthetic need, and look for interpretive opportunities there to fulfil your learning need.

Recognising the learning and aesthetic needs as common visitor motivations, the museum aims to provide certain experiences and opportunities – the exhibit of beautiful artworks, together with the production of a detailed and informative tour. A match between visitor need and experience objective, intentionally or unintentionally, can then result in a benefit or positive outcome for a visitor.

Why should museum workers care about the heirarchy of basic needs? Because we tend to define our institutions and focus our energy as agents of impact within a very narrow range of the spectrum of basic needs: typically, learning needs. Yet the concept of basic needs gives us a framework for considering the broader potential of museums. The human needs framework suggests that we can offer a range of experiences as products. But, locked in our framework of learning, we tend to overlook a lot of what visitors are telling us about the potential of museums.

What's the Potential?

Visitor studies document a range of outcomes for museum visitors. Over the last eight years, a growing number of museum researchers and scholars have attested to the frequency of different types of experience for visitors, and the fact that these types of experiences are recalled and valued greatly by visitors. My own research looks at the social uses of visits.[2] Kaplan, Bardwell and Slakter have documented the use of museums as relaxing, restorative environments.[3] On what theoretical grounds can we embrace the fact that museums are well-equipped to address a range of human needs?

I believe it is because the museum experience offers three powerful components that link together in a unique way: a) an encounter with the 'real stuff'; b) interactions with others; c) in the context of a socially-validated 'official' institution.

First and foremost, museums offer the 'real stuff' – the cultural and natural resources of our lives. I am convinced that the true power of museums lies in the stuff and our connections and responses to it – *deep responses*. Through our responses to artefacts, we express our sense of self, forge connections with others, experience different moods. The stuff is a direct conduit to human needs.

Secondly, the museum experience is largely social, providing opportunities for interaction with real and symbolic others, which provide opportunities for meeting many needs, particularly social and esteem.

Last but not least, museums in most cultures are the socially mandated 'official' institutions for the preservation and presentation of culture. Diversity and inclusion are important goals, because seeing oneself reflected within and reflected accurately can be a validating experience.

So What?

If we embrace and build upon the broad potential of museums to meet human needs, some new things happen for visitors, as well as for museums. My own work over the last three years has been in developing museum programs and exhibits that target social and esteem needs as explicit goals. The project, Museums as Therapeutic Agents, is currently in its third year of funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal agency.

While social and self-esteem needs are needs of all people, they are perhaps most acute for those individuals challenged by mental, physical or behavioural health issues. Like others, those struggling with depression, dealing with addictions, adjusting to life with terminal illness, also crave opportunities to relax, to learn, and perhaps most importantly, to affirm a sense of esteem and continued connections to others in the face of difficulty.

The services of community mental health agencies and their social workers, psychiatrists, recreation therapists and clinicians, can often help to alter negative behaviours and contribute to positive mental health through a range of therapeutic interventions. Among the tools of the mental health professional are many adjunct therapies that make use of the very resources, or stuff, that museums collect. For example, art therapy utilises artwork, the primary feature of an art museum; horticulture therapy utilises plants, readily found in a nature centre; reminiscence techniques utilise artefacts and photos, abundant in a history museum. Our community project explores this potential.

With the university as facilitator our community has forged a collaborative, consisting of workers from three different museums – an historic house museum, an anthropological museum and a nature centre, and eleven social service agencies, including a program of services for people with AIDS, nursing homes, a hospice, a shelter. The purpose of the collaborative is to explore ways in which museums can be used therapeutically for three broad groups: adults with life-threatening illness and their caregivers; senior adults; and adults with behavioural health issues such as addictions and chronic mental illness.

In our first year, we formed three teams – each partnering one museum, one lead social service agency, and representatives of the client group. Each team developed a pilot program that somehow used the resources of the museum to address social and self-esteem needs of clients. Each pilot program was evaluated, and the results of all pilots were extremely encouraging. In our second year, we enlisted the assistance of additional social service agencies and client groups to refine the pilot programs so that they might be effective with a broader range of like clients. This summer, we will embark on an empirical study designed to measure the impact of program participation on clients' self-esteem and community integration.

One of the most intriguing things we are learning is what is the mechanism responsible for the therapeutic impact. Each pilot placed the client in a different role – visitor to the museum, contributor to the museum, or volunteer interpreter for the museum, respectively. Our work thus far

The mayoral reception for Museums Australia's national council on the opening day of Fringe Benefits, the 5th Annual Museums Australia Conference. L–R: A M Banfield AM, Director Albury Regional Art Gallery and convenor of Fringe Benefits; Cr Patricia Gould, Mayor of Albury; Cr Graham Crapp, Mayor of Wodonga; Dr Sue Ann Wallace, President, Museums Australia; The Hon. Peter McGauran, Minister for the Arts and the Centenary of Federation.

MUSEUMS AS THERAPEUTIC AGENTS: TOWARD INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH Project Direction: Indiana University			
MUSEUM	**AGENCY**	**PARTICIPANTS**	**STRATEGY**
Wylie House	• *Positive Link* • Hospice of Bloomington • Families Facing Cancer Support Group, ACS	Adults with Life-Threatening Illness and Their Significant Others/Caregivers	Participant as Visitor
Mathers Museum	• *Elderhouse* • Bloomington Hospital Adult Day Care • Meadowood Nursing Home • Bloomington Convalescent Center	Senior Adults	Participant as Contributor
Hilltop Garden and Nature Center	• *Horizons* • Shelter, Inc. • Amethyst House • CBH Addictions Day Treatment Program	Adults with Behavioural Health Issues	Participant as Volunteer Interpreter

suggests that the mechanism responsible for the therapeutic impact appears to be the client's connection to the artefact, together with the role. A theory called social role valorisation is at play. Often those who are sick or disabled are consumed by that role, and no other. The museum program offers a different role, however temporary, which the client can experience. In addition to the role, it appears as though the client's ability to personally connect to particular artefacts utilised in the program is also a key to their response. The power of *the stuff* is clear.

What Next?

Theory on museums, visitor study data and programs such as Museums as Therapeutic Agents together suggest a compelling set of blueprints for the potential of museums: in embracing and addressing the full range of human needs. I believe that by focusing on different human needs as explicit goals for museums, we can impact museum practice in many fundamental ways.

In an evaluation of our work to date, collaboration members identified eight key areas that were affected by the project: collaborations and connections; resources/assistance; exhibitions, programs and offerings; audiences; collections; research directions; roles for museums; ways to position/promote museums.

Collaborations and connections – we recognised the need for working with others who have the expertise and knowledge of therapy and social work. We learned a great deal from them, and vice versa. Focusing on other human needs can reveal potential collaborators never before considered.

Resources/assistance – the agencies recognised each other as valuable resources for the present and the future. In several cases, the clients became volunteers, or contributed valuable stories that are now a part of the museum information base.

Exhibitions, programs, offerings – this project is resulting in some very new offerings for the museum – special programs with a therapeutic focus. It is also resulting in new offerings and experiences for the social service agencies to offer to their clients.

Audiences – the programs and experiences are reaching new and typically ignored audiences in the community – those with behavioural health issues, older adults with mental health issues, and adults with life-threatening illnesses. These communities have been made obvious and reachable by shifting the museum's focus onto different human needs.

Collections – several clients who participated in the pilot programs have items they wish to donate to the museums. As further therapeutic programming is developed, the museums may consider new directions for their collecting in order to expand this type of program.

Visitor research – we are now embarking on a program to evaluate the impact of the program and to explore the therapeutic mechanism – what works, for whom, and why. I am optimistic that what we learn will have relevance for all visitors – museums can and do play a role in facilitating self-esteem and social cohesion. We need to understand this better. Other fascinating research paths could unfold, exploring how best to facilitate reverential experiences, aesthetic experiences, experiences of safety, of belongingness.

What becomes most clear from emphasising human needs is the prospect of important new roles for museums – consequently, new and expanded ways to position museums, promote them to communities and nations. It's up to each of us – together with our communities – to help the museum field reach self-actualisation – to realise the potential of museums.

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This is an abridged version of Lois Silverman's paper delivered at Museums Australia's 1999 national conference Fringe Benefits, held in Albury in May. Contact Lois at the Department of Recreation and Park Administration <lsilverm@indiana.edu>

A Stitch in Time: Maintaining Educational Audiences

CAROL SCOTT

Introduction

There is disquieting evidence that museum attendances world-wide are beginning to decline.[1] While the reasons for this phenomenon are still unclear, there is considerable speculation regarding changing leisure patterns, the availability of home entertainment and the impact on museums of the growing acceptance of the simulated and the virtual as acceptable substitutes for the real and the authentic. In this context, maintaining core audiences is critical.

School and educational groups are one core audience that museums cannot do without. This audience is not only significant in numerical terms; it is important because it represents recognition of museums' commitment to learning outcomes as a key aspect of the visitor experience. Yet here, too, there are indications that museums will have to work harder in the future to maintain this sector. This article outlines the outcomes of a recent research project into the educational market, undertaken at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, that describes some of the challenges that we, in museums, face.[2]

The Study

Previous studies at the Powerhouse have evaluated program provision (1992), teacher response to new programs (1993), reasons for undertaking school excursions (1993), the feasibility of developing tertiary audiences (1994) and teacher response to a marketing campaign (1996).[3] In spite of a wealth of information from these studies, a full evaluation of the educational programs and services was considered timely in light of anecdotal evidence that a growing number of competitors were entering the field and that there were changes affecting the educational excursion market overall.

Accordingly, the study was designed to address four main areas:

- a retrospective analysis of participation statistics across all educational groups (pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary);
- an audit of the museum's educational booking system;
- an environmental scan of the educational excursion market to identify competitors and the factors affecting excursion choices; and
- a qualitative investigation into the level of satisfaction with existing programs, services and facilities and an exploration of possible future directions.

This report concentrates on the findings that are of greatest relevance to the museum community in general – the outcomes of the environmental scan and the qualitative research with teachers.

Challenging Findings

One of the first tasks of the study was to scope the environment in which educational excursions are planned to identify the issues impacting on excursion decisions. The outcomes of this stage combined with the second stage findings from teacher focus groups revealed three major issues:

- the increasing range of competitors;
- the pressures facing teachers organising educational excursions; and
- the trend to customised programs and services.

Competitors – the study identified 43 different attractions and venues in Sydney to which pre-school, primary and secondary teachers were taking excursions. Museums, zoos and aquaria were competing with an array that included parks, shopping precincts, city farms, harbour cruises, children's activity centres, sporting venues, airports, theatres and public services such as the local fire station and a waste management centre. The diversity was astonishing and suggested that teachers cast their net widely to offer their students a diverse and interesting range of excursion experiences. In addition, the study also found that incursions, in which a performer, play or activity is brought into the school are enjoying increasing popularity due to cost-benefit factors and ease of organisation.

School-based factors affecting excursion planning and decisions – not surprisingly, the study found that teacher commitment to educational excursions remains high. Teachers see the value of museum excursions in terms of their relationship to key learning areas, the opportunity for students to experience a dimension beyond the classroom, the potential to involve students in hands-on, participatory learning experiences and as a break from normal routine.

However, in spite of this commitment and the obvious effort that teachers make to plan a varied and educationally enriching excursion program, in many cases, they are doing so within a context of increasing difficulty and constraint. Pressures on teachers (particularly in secondary schools) for increased accountability, adoption of new roles and acceptance of heavier workloads make excursions more difficult to organise and, in some cases, a burden.

Teachers interviewed for this study cited the following issues that affect excursion planning:

- difficulties for teachers extracting time from other tasks;
- difficulties for teachers securing support from other personnel within the school to cover classes during absences;
- requirements for teachers to have emergency care certificates before they are allowed to take excursions; and
- logistical difficulties organising excursions such as contacting venues in a teacher lunch break or recess period; as well as
- socio-economic factors affecting the ability of some parents and schools to afford excursion costs; and
- socio-cultural factors resulting in parents expressing strong preferences for certain types of excursions.

In this context, the study found there was a growing pattern of deterrents, particularly in secondary government schools, to planning excursions. These included issues relating to student safety, cost, accessibility of a venue and the travel time to get there, the perceived ability of a venue to accommodate large numbers of students effectively, uncertainty about the educational relevance of the program on offer and the limited time available for excursions in the school's overall timetable.

Winning ways with services and program provision – is it all too difficult?

No. In spite of the pressures outlined by participants in this study, certain factors were identified that will encourage teachers to plan to undertake an excursion. Museums take note.

In an age of accountability, it is not surprising that the justification for an educational excursion depends on the integration of the experience with crucial elements in the syllabus. If there is doubt or ambiguity about the information provided by a venue, teachers are inclined to look elsewhere to find clear clues which guarantee this aspect.

Once an excursion venue has been identified, personalised customer service makes an essential difference. Helpful staff, designated as 'education officers', are perceived by teachers as people who will understand their needs, be able to provide appropriate advice and ensure that the relevant services will be made available.

Relevant services include not only well designed teaching materials, but also information that outlines the whole excursion experience. Increasingly, in the light of time and organisational constraints, teachers want to book an 'excursion package'. A 'package' provides full details of costs, location, parking facilities, program time, food outlets, maps and way-finding tools and a clear outline of the key learning areas and other excursion goals that can be addressed through purchasing the package.

And the indications from the study were that many of the non-museum competitors were prepared to provide just this sort of customised programming and packaging!

The competitive edge – as excursions become more complex tasks, it is not surprising that teachers are seeking the best value for the effort involved. Added value can be achieved by combining more than one venue into a single excursion day, particularly for schools coming from far afield. So the proximity of a museum to other venues is an added factor that can be attractively promoted as part of the 'package'.

In the light, too, of fewer resources to cover classes during absences, teachers are often pooling classes and bringing larger groups to venues. Venues which help teachers ensure effective supervision of groups is a crucial factor in teachers' satisfaction. Especially for teachers with younger children, 'crowd control' is a real issue and contained spaces in which briefings can occur is as essential to the overall experience as the exploration of open exhibition spaces.

The study also revealed an unexpected outcome. While curricular concerns are still evident and the relevance of the excursion to key learning areas is a factor in justifying excursions, multiple goals now characterise the planned excursion. Teachers recognise the need for off-site experiences that, besides meeting syllabus requirements, also address social, cultural and vocational needs. The venue that can offer an experience that addresses these goals on top of curricular relevance has a package worth offering.

Conclusion

The synergy between the educational mission of schools and the learning environment of museums has established the educational sector as a core audience. However, other venues and attractions are actively competing for this audience in vigorous and aggressive ways. If museums are to maintain their share of this market, then we need to 'know our audiences' well and apply the lessons from evaluation and research to attract, service and provide for it into the 21st century.

Carol Scott is manager of evaluation and visitor research at the Powerhouse Museum.

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The Inaugural Melbourne International Biennial

ROBYN MCKENZIE

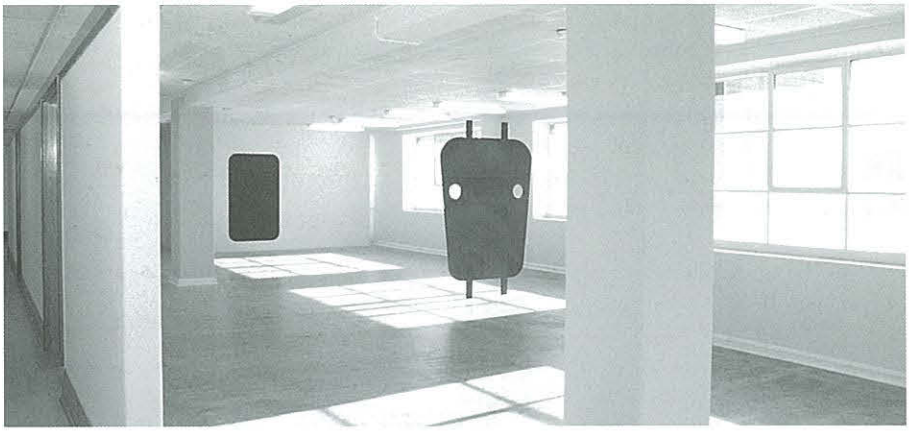
The Melbourne Biennial team has pulled off a feat, in terms of vision, planning and logistics. Given the resources and the time-line, something akin to pulling a rabbit out of a hat. The project was big: with 56 artists in the main 'Signs of Life' exhibition and eleven national participating country pavilions billeted in galleries – both public and commercial – around the inner city. Melbourne has not seen contemporary art from elsewhere on this scale or at this concentration before. The biennial confirmed there is a world 'out there'.

Getting the event up and running relied on a canny use of available resources and the creation of synergies. The pavilion program made use of the existing infrastructure of the galleries network, not just the space but the expertise of staff. A way of involving the broader community, the galleries in effect become sponsors.

The main exhibition 'Signs of Life' was camped out in the old telephone exchange building in the city centre, soon to be redeveloped into apartments. The building's owners, architectural firm Nation Fender Katsalidis, allowed the biennial to take advantage of a 'window of opportunity' while at the same time flogging their wares – with a model apartment taking up a fair chunk of the ground floor foyer, a big banner on the side of the building with a clip from an Ingres painting to advertise Hero Apartments, and a sandwich board on the pavement outside reading, happily enough, 'Inspect Now'.

The qualities of the building were important to the feel of the show. A modernist (c.1940s) city office block, there was something slightly transgressive about art 'squatting' in its gutted shell, lending the project an aura of radical action, as if the occupation was driven by cultural necessity.

The vertical orientation of the exhibition with eight floors or levels for the viewer to move through, was novel. Some levels were stripped down to raw concrete floors, others were left with carpeting and office partitions in place, separating projects from one another and providing sound-proofing. There were few places in the exhibition where works impinged on each other. Few suffered without the support of the white cube, and the often tawdry setting added to the impact of others – such as Robert Gover's subterranean paradise viewed through the open lid of a seemingly discarded suitcase. The views out of the building's windows, onto the city fabric, were threatening to some works (and were blocked out), whereas for others they were an added bonus: Ricky Swallow's installation annexed the whole of the city, viewed out of the top floor windows, as a backdrop to his similarly detailed model dioramas.



Terri Bird, *Fashioning a Future and other Fictions of Being*, 1999. Moulded plastic, paint and plasterboard. From Signs of Life, May–July, 1999. Photo: John Brash

For this inaugural event, artistic director Juliana Engberg argued it was important to follow a model that would have maximum impact, and that would be relatively easy to sell to collaborators, sponsors and the public: a big exhibition, a single curatorial vision. (Notably she wrote all the catalogue entries on the individual artists herself.) Her other driving idea was to have an exhibition that mirrored Melbourne's own contemporary art scene – instead of importing a list of big names at the mature stage of careers, the majority of participating artists were younger, with emerging practices.

In her short introductory statement, Engberg seeks to differentiate this project from the recent tendency to look at 'the prosaic aspects of daily life' – to 'register a bigger picture'. But the 'art and life' nexus was still very much the subject here. She made a very broad claim for the role contemporary art can play in helping us understand our world. 'I wanted to draw attention to the role artists play in helping us define and think through the way in which we encounter life'. It is hard for me to discern the line in this hopeful and redemptive message between curatorial thesis and savvy marketing schtick. But then I'm a cynical critic.

It is the success of the exhibition which will put this thesis – the question of contemporary art's relevance – to the test. An energetic and engaging mix of works, the majority had a directness of apprehension or effect. It is something for audiences to decide.

But labels won't help them. The biennial's response to the vexed question of how to provide information and how much, was to have a volunteer floor walker on each level, doubling a security role with providing information to viewers, when and if requested. With tickets at $18 (with the usual discounts plus one for city workers) viewers got the chance to return twice to the exhibition (the ticket including three visits in all).

Extended for two weeks until 11 July, the one judgment pending on the event is the financial one. The difficulty of getting through to potential audiences for a new event like this, even with Engberg unflagging in her role as frontman, were considerable without having the hard money to pay for it up front.

Robyn McKenzie is editor of LIKE, Art magazine. The August issue of LIKE carries a special feature on the Biennial.

Resale Rights – Not Yet for the European Union

ANDREW T. KENYON

Should artists receive money when art work resells? If Australian legislation existed for a resale right, artists or their estates would be entitled to a small percentage of any commercial resale of their work. Questions about a resale right, or droit de suite, gained prominence in Australia after the mid-1997 auction sale of the painting *Water Dreaming at Kalipinya* for $206,000.[1] The artist Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula had sold the work for approximately $150 in the early 1970s.

The concept of a resale right exists in the main international convention underlying copyright law. It is not mandatory, however, for signatories to the Berne Convention to provide for a droit de suite and Australia has not recognised it. Droit de suite's origins are in continental European law, but recent developments suggest it will not become a European Union-wide provision.

Late in June 1999, the United Kingdom succeeded in having a proposal postponed. It would have required a droit de suite to exist throughout the European Union. On one level, the proposal failed for reasons quite unrelated to arguments about whether a resale right would serve artists' interests well, and where the public interest lies between artists and the art trade. The United Kingdom agreed with Germany to oppose a separate plan to force car manufacturers to recycle elements of old vehicles.

Then Germany, which held the EU presidency until the end of June, did not hold a scheduled vote on the resale right. Germany is expected to oppose the resale right if the plan re-emerges. This would create a large enough minority vote to block the plan. British media reports suggest the resale right proposal will be shelved.

This does not answer the basic questions about whether a droit de suite should be introduced in Australia. Ethical arguments for an entitlement are fairly clear. Many artists would argue creators should share in the rising value of their art. Visual artists' incomes appear to be lower than for many other art forms. And the idea has an obvious appeal when raised in relation to indigenous artists. Work that is now fetching the highest-ever prices for Aboriginal art often was sold for very little by the artists.

Visual artists' incomes appear to be lower than for many other art forms. And the idea has an obvious appeal when raised in relation to indigenous artists. Work that is now fetching the highest-ever prices for Aboriginal art often was sold for very little by the artists.

A resale right, however, may not be the best reform to seek. While economic return to artists is important, a droit de suite may not provide that very well. The pragmatic arguments against a droit de suite may not answer the primary motivating forces supporting the right. If a resale right is to be introduced, however, its effectiveness should be carefully considered. It may be that a resale right relocates the trade, is not enforced, and benefits very few artists.

Some commentators argue the commercial art market will move away from a jurisdiction having the resale right to somewhere without it. Historically, the United States provides an example. California has had droit de suite style legislation for nearly three decades. Initially, it appears to have had a significant impact on the trade. In the recent European plans, the opposition of the British art trade appears to have been crucial. The trade, reputedly worth £2.2 billion per annum, feared the secondary art market would move to Switzerland and the United States. Although Australia has certain export controls on art works, some work could still move before its resale. And enforcement of those export controls has been problematic.

Secondly, some commentators suggest the right often is ignored. The money simply is not paid, and artists may have trouble pursuing it. There seems to be insufficient evidence from Europe about how often the right actually gets to artists, but the common problem of enforcing rights may exist here for artists.

Thirdly, in countries like France it seems only a very few estates of famous artists receive any meaningful amounts of money. (And it is most often the estates, not living artists.) It may be better to assist artists directly through funding and other support. Alternative models may be seen as general taxes levied on art sales. A pool of money could be raised to support newer artists. Such models of 'industry support' may be better to pursue politically than the droit de suite. Obviously, they would not all receive less opposition from the trade.

All these comments apply to the idea of a resale right in general, but the financial need may be more acute for indigenous artists. Since the 1998 Bulun Bulun decision,[2] indigenous communities can have enforceable interests in the copyright in art works that depict stories the community controls. Similarly, it may be appropriate to create a resale right in relation to the communities. In any event, there may be better reforms to spend energy on, like assisting indigenous agencies to use available legal avenues. For all Australian artists, however, the recent European experience suggests introducing a resale right may be a particularly difficult political ambition.

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Update
Collections Management and Conservation Working Party

ROBYN SLOGGETT

At its last meeting in May, the Collections Management and Conservation Working Party confirmed its focus on encouraging Australian museums of all types and sizes to adopt appropriate best practice standards, with particular emphasis on the use of HCC developed products. These products, the result of extensive research and development programs undertaken for the working party, include:

Building and Storage Standards – a project examining options for building and storage design to develop standards that reflect world's best practice. Issues relating to passive environmental control in new and existing buildings are being studied.

Disaster Preparedness Plans – a project examining methodologies for the development of disaster preparedness plans. It links closely to other management tools being developed for the working party, including Significance Assessment, the Building and Storage Standards and the Conservation Assessment Plan.

re-Collections – the package is now complete and is being launched around the country – in Adelaide and Mannum, Sydney and Orange, and Melbourne and Bendigo. Further launches will take place around the country up until Christmas.

Significance Assessment – the first report, which was based on extensive research and a number of workshops, is complete. The second stage is a series of workshops trialling a significance model at a number of venues.

Skills Gap Audit – the AICCM has just completed a skills gap audit of conservation professionals and para professionals in Australia. This has resulted in the identification of gaps and of mechanisms which could be developed to strengthen conservation practice in Australia. A final document with recommendations will be completed by September.

Research Audit – an examination of current research models, practices, areas of interest and funding streams is being examined. This will provide information on successful research activity and serve as a basis for identifying gaps in research in museums across the country.

Code of Practice – the AICCM has completed a Draft Code of Practice, encompassing a revised Code of Ethics. The draft code has been published and is being trialled before its acceptance by the AICCM as an official document. It will be linked to the current system of accreditation which will subsequently be more tightly controlled and monitored.

Development of a Best Practice Model for Conservation and Preservation Assessment Plans for Museum Collections – the report is complete, a draft model proposed, and is now on AMOL. Workshops will be held as part of its production. Further developments from this initial phase are being examined, including the development of a pro forma to assist with the conservation planning process.

Conservation Section on AMOL – the collections management and conservation section of AMOL now carries a substantial amount of information. The working party will continue to identify useful information for the site. Future material generated by the working party will be provided to AMOL. The Conservators' Code of Practice, the results of the Skills Gap Audit, and the Best Practice Model for Conservation and Preservation Assessment Plans will all be placed on AMOL in the near future.

Robyn Sloggett is chief conservator at the Ian Potter Art Conservation Centre.

Museum National – Review Principles

Museum National aims to cover issues relevant to museum practice. Therefore, books suitable for review should focus on museum issues and, to the extent they are critical to museum practice, the various disciplines of the museum profession. Thus, an anthropological study of material culture or collecting would be appropriate, but a study of cultural mores would probably not; books about museum collections of machinery would be appropriate, but not publications purely on/about machinery. Books by museum authors may be appropriate even if dealing with abstract topics if they publish museum-based research.

Museum National aims to publish the opinions of its members. Therefore, reviews should be written by museum professionals rather than non-museum workers. However, the definition of 'museum professional' is understood to be rather flexible, and may include museum friends. It is acknowledged that it is sometimes difficult to find the right reviewer; in these cases some discretion should be allowed.

Museum National aims to encourage a culture of professionalism among Australian museum people. Therefore, it seeks reviews of Australian books and exhibitions in the spirit of acknowledging excellence and evaluation of content and style.

Linda Young is *Museum National*'s reviews editor. Readers interested in contributing to this section of the magazine should contact Linda at the Australian National University, Canberra. Tel (02) 6249 4008, fax (02) 6249 3969,
email lyoung@coombs.anu.edu.au

Consultants and Freelance Workers in Museums: A Museums Association Report

Compiled by Rachel Hasted for the [UK] Museums Association. London, 1996.

It is a sad fact of life for publicly funded museums that the days of substantial, permanently staffed establishments have long disappeared. During the past two decades or more, all agencies funded by government have been required to implement 'downsizing' and 'outsourcing' practices. This has been driven in part by financial pressures and management strategies, and the pressure to perform an increasing range of activities and tasks. Museums have responded by examining fundraising programs, reviewing staff employment options and engaging specialist advice on a needs basis. There is also the Realpolitik of the largely political agenda of 'small government' and 'outsourcing' particular functions, which on the surface might be undertaken more efficiently (but not always more effectively) by the private sector. Increasingly, museums and other cultural institutions are engaging consultants and short-term contract or freelance staff to undertake work which was formerly performed in-house.

This trend is international. In 1995–96 the UK Museums Association conducted a study on the number of people working as consultants and freelancers in museums and the type of work they were performing. The report also investigated how the museum community and peak professional body could best respond to the changing experience of museum workers in terms of training, representation and support. A summary overview of the British situation is that the number of museum related consultants and freelancers is around 500 and growing, largely because of redundancies or early retirement. Surprisingly, a large number of respondents (73 per cent) took a positive view about self-employment as it provided autonomy, flexible working arrangements and a personal sense of achievement.

The main areas of work in which consultants were engaged were education, project feasibility studies, exhibition research, forward planning, management or organisational development, conservation, collections management and visitor services. The majority of contracts were for periods of between one and six months, although some freelancers were employed on renewable contracts lasting several years. The report also covers patterns of work, contractual arrangements, insurance, patterns of working, evaluation, training and professional development.

What are the implications for museums? There is an underlying concern that self-employed workers threaten the security of permanent museum staff, often in curatorial specialist areas. On the other hand, some museums have never had the specialist staff they needed for collections management or sufficient staff to expand and develop their services. The growth of project and special purpose funding allows for short-term appointments to carry out particular or specialist tasks. One of the major disadvantages in using consultants and freelancers is the loss of corporate knowledge to the institution.

The British study also identified that the appointment process is often informal and based on personal contacts, that work is not advertised and that in some cases rates of pay are low. This raises obvious implications for institutional equal opportunities policies. The implications of self-employment for museum workers include a sense of isolation and lack of networking, financial burdens, limited access to training and professional development, and practical issues such as the cost of professional insurance. Finally there is a set of implications for the UK Museums Association in terms of reviewing its code of practice and conduct to adequately reflect the needs of self-employed members and providing improved professional support and advice to these members.

The report, undertaken by a consultant, makes 21 recommendations which promote best practice for institutions in terms of how they manage consultants and freelancers; for the UK Museums Association in providing better quality services and advice; and for consultants and freelancers on how they might improve their own working conditions. Most of the recommendations are practical and, on the surface, achievable in a short period.

Overall, this is a timely and useful report. Museums Australia might wish to consider undertaking a similar study of the Australian situation.

Darryl McIntyre
General Manager, Core Operations, National Museum of Australia, Canberra.

Commentary on the Unidroit Convention

By Lyndel V. Prott. Institute of Art and Law, Leicester, 1997.

Any museum person who reads the newspapers or watches TV must by now be aware of the appalling level of morality displayed by some of those involved in the buying, selling and collecting of works of art and antiquities. We have learned that internationally respected auction houses have been knowingly involved in the illicit traffic of cultural property, either illegally excavated from archaeological sites, against the laws of the country concerned, or even works that have been stolen from their rightful owners. We have been treated to the spectacle of major museums resisting claims for the return of works of art stolen by members of invading (or liberating) armies during World War Two, or which were left in the hands of others for safe-keeping by Holocaust victims and were subsequently sold by those to whom they were entrusted.

Fortunately, not everyone interested in cultural property takes such an unprincipled stand. There are a number of international conventions (treaties) aimed at ensuring that cultural property illegally exported will be returned to its country of origin, in particular circumstances. The most important of these are the 1972 *UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export* and *Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* and *the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its Protocol.*

These two conventions require governments party to them to put in place a series of administrative arrangements to ensure that any cultural property illegally taken out of its country of origin will be returned, provided it falls within the definitions and time frames of the conventions. Under both conventions, it is the state (i.e. country) which must initiate action to recover or return the illegally removed property.

However, there has until recently been no internationally agreed means for an individual to gain access to the courts of another country to seek the return of cultural property that was stolen or illegally exported. The 1995 *Unidroit Convention on Stolen and Illegally Exported Objects* aims to correct this deficiency. (Unidroit is a shorthand name for the Rome-based International Institute for the Unification of Private Law.)

Basically, Article 3 (1) of the convention provides that 'the possessor of a cultural object that was stolen shall return it', and Article 3 (2) provides that 'a cultural object which has been unlawfully excavated or lawfully excavated but unlawfully retained shall be considered stolen'. The convention provides that a claim for restitution of a stolen cultural object or a request for the return of an illegally exported cultural object may be brought before the courts of the contracting state where the cultural object is located.

That sounds all very well, but there are a few snags. First, it only applies to cultural objects that are stolen or illegally exported after the convention comes into force for a country. Second, the claim for restitution has to be made within three years of finding out the location of the object and the identity of its possessor and, in any case, within 50 years of the theft. Third, the possessor of a stolen object required to return it shall be entitled, at the time of its restitution, to fair and reasonable compensation provided the possessor neither knew nor ought reasonably to have known that the object was stolen and can prove that they exercised due diligence when acquiring the object.

Nevertheless, the principles of the convention represent fundamental new remedies available to those whose property has been stolen.

Commentary on the Unidroit Convention sets out in detail the history of the negotiations and, drawing on this, provides a commentary on the meaning to be attributed to particular provisions. We can take some pride in the fact that one of the prime movers in getting the convention agreed was an Australian, Lyndel Prott, a senior officer of UNESCO's Department of Cultural Heritage, and the author of this book.

It is a difficult book to review. It is not one to be read in a single sitting, or to be kept on the bedside table for dipping into on sleepless nights. Rather, it belongs on the bookshelves of anyone who is involved in the acquisition of cultural property, especially anyone who is active in the international art or antiquities market, and should be referred to carefully by them before signing on the dotted line.

Don McMichael
Environment and heritage consultant, Canberra.

Museum Ethics

Edited by Gary Edson. Routledge, London, 1997.

It is now more than two centuries since the opening of Western museum collections to the public: their transformative move in post-Revolutionary Europe from royal treasury to heritage site for a citizenry. However, museums have never been in such a multiplied, high-profile and yet volatile condition in their charge to serve the 'public good'.

As museums have risen in public consciousness and status since the 1960s, through a greater pace of exhibitions, and projection of their collections and programs, the interface between museums and society has become ever more reflexive. A consequence is that this reflexive interface is often more perilously subject to the pulsations of counter-crossing social, economic, managerial (and most difficult of all, sometimes political) forces.

In such circumstances, a study such as the present one, which richly explores museum ethics in all aspects of their formulation and application, may prove both timely and instrumentally valuable. As this book discloses, the importance of a thoroughgoing grasp and commitment to the ethical basis of museums' work — on which not only their character and operations, but their ultimate survival as a useful and trustworthy social institution depends — needs urgent reconsideration by all who work in and for museums. 'In general, there is an unprecedented demand for ethical judgement and decisive action by persons in the museum profession. There is also a greater concern for public responsibility by those in and entering the museum profession.' (p.115)

Museum Ethics is another volume in Routledge's invaluable Heritage: Care-Preservation-Management series. It has been put together by the director of the museum training program at Texas Tech University, Gary Edson, who also contributes the chapters that constitute Part I of this volume. Meanwhile, the editor has commissioned a variety of essays (in Part 2) from people in different countries, practical settings and cultural contexts, to ensure another objective of this study: that it is not grounded merely in a monocultural framework of values.

Accordingly, many contending forces, through newly emergent, multicultural perspectives, must now be addressed in any inclusive discussion of museum ethics. This book therefore navigates some itineraries through the reefs of current ('multicultural') partisanships. It seeks mutuality across apparent divides, in the constitution of a broad horizon that unites different human societies beyond the boundaries of nation, geography, or ethnicity. *Museum Ethics* appeals to an ecumenical recognition, spawned in virtually all societies' value-systems, of communally binding sanctions that secure elevated ideals of social good beyond individually competitive forces of self-interest.

The book pursues its quarry exhaustively: the ethical basis of museums as an indissoluble part of their social contract and commitment to public service. However, *Museum Ethics* is both practical as well as theoretical, and it interconnects these objectives continually through its method and structure.

The compilation and arrangement of chapters constantly inflects the book's core subject. This is achieved not through the genre of theoretical treatise but rather through changing mechanisms of dialectical exploration, backgrounding, expansion and synthesis. It is expository and propositional but not prescriptive or coercive. Such an approach is affirmatively utilised by the editor as pertinent to nurturing ethical behaviour — which is acquired rather than innate. Ethical conduct needs to be actively learned through discrimination rather than passively assumed through disposition.

As *Museum Ethics* thoroughly elucidates, the ethical conduct of museums involves a set of known ideals and actively embraced standards, shared by many different kinds of museum professionals and extending beyond the confines of a single institution or nation. Ethical conduct arises – and is secured – through a constant disposition to reflect on decision-making according to a body of widely shared standards of professional behaviour, and a communal commitment to act beyond self-interest.

Edson's book builds examples (through recourse to aspects of the case-study method in North American law and business schools) of many practical situations of ethical application through scenario-testing. In addition, it acknowledges the fundamental difference of an ethical consciousness (animated by active striving towards the ideals of communal duty) from mere adherence to laws (grounded in the lower common social denominator of compliance).

An ethical basis underpinning the activities of those who work in museums is vital to their self-definition, their constitution as a profession, and their position of regard in society, based on a commitment to knowledge, cultural responsibility and public responsiveness. The ethical basis of museums can be in jeopardy if it is not actively championed. It needs determined advocacy by museum leaders, and active support through all museum organisations concerned with professional standards for the maintenance of human and natural heritage.

This book contains a rich variety of materials, dealing with subject matter that is fundamental to the constitution of an ethical consciousness within museums. It is also inflected by the varied perspectives of other commissioned writers, to nourish the multifarious aspects of such a consciousness as required in and of museums right now.

Bernice Murphy
Vice-President, International Council of Museums and member of ICOM's Standing Ethics Committee, Sydney.

Exhibiting Authenticity

By David Phillips. Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1997.

Authenticity is a fascinating concept. In this work David Phillips examines the role it plays in museums, particularly in relation to works of art. Curiously, he leaves the central concept largely undefined. He views it as a value in search of the respect accorded to other terms such as 'real', 'true', 'natural', 'original', or 'essential', but we are given few other clues. Instead, the author focuses on the things done in the name of authenticity by art curators, conservators and curators, in the areas of attribution, conservation and display respectively. His main claim is that they should be wary of the concept of authenticity as it is not as useful for their work as one might expect. The core of the book comprises a group of chapters examining the problem of attribution in art history and a second group looking at conservation issues. A rather perfunctory final chapter discusses the role of the curator.

There are two principal problems with *Exhibiting Authenticity*: one stylistic, the other substantive. To take the former: the work is seriously compromised by Phillips' remarkably infelicitous style. As a former art curator, Phillips has an eye for the subtleties of painting but no ear at all for the rhythms of prose, and little aptitude for clear, let alone elegant, expression. Words are piled up into dense and indigestible sentences. Take this all-too-typical example: 'If this object is to be understood not just as evidence of Flammarion's creativity, but as one that buts (sic) compulsively into visual conversation decade after decade, its status as a re-presentation of sixteenth-century conventions, as an example of attitudes to authenticity in the nineteenth century, thanks to its inauthentically authentic border, and as an image that in some way has become quintessentially a sign of cosmology (but preferably shorn of its border) then Bruno Weber's researches were indispensable.' (p.121)

Beyond this, the book's main strength is paradoxically also its weakness. Phillips enlists a mass of concrete examples but fails to marshal them in any systematic way that advances the argument, and much of the detail obscures rather than reveals the point he is trying to make. Often the relevance of particular instances is unclear, but even where this is not the case, problems remain. For example, in discussing the taboo against mixing artistic values and financial matters in museum presentations, Phillips argues that curators seldom act purely just as inspectors of artistic value. The conclusion that 'transcendent aesthetic values cannot be kept distinct from cash values' is hardly surprising. The more important question as to precisely how this connection should be cashed out (as it were) is not addressed.

Phillips' view is that 'what art historians, conservators and curators do cannot usefully be explained in terms of authenticity'. In the lengthy discussion of the identification and attribution of works of fine art, he argues persuasively that traps abound for the unwary and the unlucky. He seems to want to make the stronger claim that the very concept of authenticity is thereby irretrievably compromised. It is not clear why. Identification and attribution are difficult, sometimes practically impossible – as his examples show. But there is surely a fact of the matter in relation to any given work, and hence the question whether it is authentic will always be relevant. In the end, even Phillips resiles from his initial claim. He acknowledges the 'unrivalled precision' that can be achieved and the argument descends to platitudes such as 'scholars of art ... are missing a point if they do not understand that their identifications do imply theoretical positions, that identifications don't just come unpackaged' – but whoever seriously thought otherwise?

The chapters dealing with conservation issues are far more interesting and compelling. He discusses, for example, the ways in which the passage of time has affected the various pigments used in easel painting, with implications for colour and tonal quality. He shows how it is sometimes impossible to know for sure what the artist intended: for instance, did the artist allow for the fact that the colour and tone would vary over time, and thus how can we be sure that intervening to 'restore' a work is being true to the author's intentions? Many of his examples are fascinating, for example, the discussion of Duane Hanson's *Sunbather* (1971), which had to be 'updated' with newer components in order to maintain the 'original', authentic effect. What this suggests is that in these cases, meanings are not fixed and there may well not be a fact of the matter; to this extent the idea of the authentic is essentially problematic.

Unfortunately, the ponderous style makes it heavy going indeed to uncover these gems, and few readers are likely to make the effort.

Robert Nichols
Gallery Development, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

Paying Attention: Visitors and Museum Exhibitions

Beverley Serrell. Washington: American Association of Museums, 1998.

Paying Attention: Visitors and Museum Exhibitions takes a systematic approach to examining the fundamentals of the museum visit in order to discover ways of measuring learning in exhibitions. Much time has been spent in the museum forum evaluating the effectiveness of exhibitions and understanding what visitors get from museums. This is one more scientific report, putting forward a different model. It does not detail exactly what visitors learned from the 110 exhibitions surveyed, but offers possible ways of extracting this information by measuring visitor behaviours.

Practitioners in visitor evaluation and those with a scientific background will find this report, with its scattergrams and correlations, familiar territory. However, the details may cause confusion in those not familiar with such techniques. Reading the executive summary, along with the 'Conclusions and implications for museum practitioners' is the best way to appreciate the depth of this work.

Paying Attention can be read in two different ways: first, if you are simply interested in the results of the work and second, if you are interested in replicating the study. The author's 'Methods Work Book' is provided as an appendix for those who want to test her techniques in their own exhibitions.

The report builds upon past studies to develop further debate about, and improvements to, understanding and quantifying the visitor experience. Its purpose is three-fold: to develop methodology for studying the effectiveness of educational exhibitions, defined by thoroughness of use; to create a database of visitor use of educational exhibitions; and to generate a model for interpreting the data and establishing some parameters of relative success.

The notion of 'thorough use' as an appropriate evaluative measure of the impact of educational exhibitions underlies the study. The idea of 'thorough use' is measured by the capture of variables such as the amount of time visitors spend in exhibitions and the proportion of visitors who use the exhibitions fully, i.e., those who spend a long time in the exhibition and use a high proportion of the available elements. Serrell notes that her methods are only applicable to thematic exhibitions with educational objectives aimed at a broad audience. They should not be used to evaluate exhibitions without overarching themes, or targeted at specific visitors with prior knowledge, or areas where visitors are expected to have in-depth experiences with only one or two exhibition elements.

If you are wondering about your visitors' actions in your museum, the studies are interesting, although not altogether surprising. According to Serrell's data, visitors, on average, spend 20 minutes or less in exhibitions and pause at only one-third of the available exhibition elements. The more times they stop at each element the longer they stay in the exhibition. They move at an average of 300 square feet per minute for non-diorama exhibitions and about 4000 square feet per minute for dioramas.

The applications from this data show that exceptionally thoroughly used exhibitions are rare; that smaller exhibitions with fewer elements are more thoroughly used; and that knowing how many activities a visitor can successfully accomplish in 20 minutes or less is a useful exhibition planning technique. (It would have been useful for measurements to be in metric as well as imperial units). For those of us hoping this study would prove otherwise, yes, 58 per cent of visitors turned right upon entering an exhibition!

The study is only 56 pages long but covers five years of visitor evaluation over a rather impressive number of exhibitions in a wide variety of museum types. It is followed by seven appendices, which relate details of the study's empirical data. Appendix G, the most interesting, illustrates some of the exhibitions surveyed with photographs as well as other data. A short summary of visitor interaction and the amount of time they spent at each exhibition is also provided.

Overall it seems *Paying Attention* is aimed at those museum practitioners who are heavily involved in visitor evaluation and are keen to replicate the study for their own museum exhibitions. However, it also provides interesting insights into visitor behaviours for those who wish only to compare their exhibitions with those surveyed. This study is a work-in-progress, designed to offer some solutions to the questions posed by the examination of visitors and museum exhibitions, as well as encouraging continued data collection, further analysis and discussion. It is not the sort of publication you expect to see in every museum bookcase, but it will certainly find a place in the offices of everyone interested in visitors.

Lisa Jones
Curator, Queensland Police Museum.

Katta Djinoong: to see and understand us

Western Australian Museum.

The keenly awaited Aboriginal Gallery, Katta Djinoong, opened in April this year. The vital community consultation and collaboration approach to Katta Djinoong has enriched the exhibition with personal experience and meanings. It exemplifies how the development of relationships between museums and owners of cultural heritage enliven and strengthen both collections and exhibitions alike. Direct quotations from Aboriginal people are prominently featured throughout the exhibition, offering both opinions and personal experience. Introduced by a floor to ceiling panel of photographs, the whole exhibition indicates that Katta Djinoong is a space dealing with difference, individuals, community, history and current issues in a representation of Aboriginal Western Australia as widely diverse and dynamic.

The bulk of the exhibition consists of four interconnected areas each dealing with one of the main contemporary Aboriginal groupings within the state, namely Noongar (south west), Pilbara, Desert and Kimberley. There are also areas devoted to the stories of the stolen generations and to a temporary exhibition, and all are introduced by a large number of panels spread around the vicinity of the gallery entrance.

The official party at the opening of the Aboriginal Gallery, Katta Djinoong, WA Museum. The floor design is by Noongar artist Brenda Hansen.

The exhibition carries a powerful message of Aboriginal cultures as alive and strong. This is made evident in the headings for the panels, the stories told within the gallery and particularly through the integration of historical and contemporary objects, photographs and stories. This integration is a strength of the exhibition. It results in a largely non-linear representation of history, focusing instead on both the similarities and differences between individuals, between groups and over time. The exhibition contains a wonderful collection of objects amassed throughout the 20th century. No mention is made of the process by which the museum obtained them, though many are identified with the station name or locality from which they were collected. They are often used to great effect, as, for example in the case on the Pinjarra massacre where a 'Brown Bess' musket, musket ball, and pistol are placed in front of traditional Aboriginal weaponry. Objects are clearly numbered and labels are easy to read.

The confused recent history of Rottnest Island, and of attitudes towards nineteenth century Aboriginal resistance fighter Yagan, are examples of historical issues that are still the subject of current affairs, addressed in Katta Djinoong. However, their contemporary sociopolitical significance is unfortunately not directly tackled. A greater focus on current issues and implications might very effectively marry some quite traditional museological representations to issues of popular currency, thereby strengthening the underlying feeling of past stories being interwoven with the present.

Good design creates a sense of space and contextual environment in a very tightly packed gallery. The use of natural materials and environmentally referential colours and floor coverings evokes regions and places for visitors as they move through the exhibition. This gives some sense of being part of the exhibition, rather than simply looking in at showcases from the outside, although more effective signposting of these spaces would make visitor understanding and interpretation easier. The gallery walls are curved wherever possible, offering interesting spaces and places for private contemplation of the sometimes confronting and emotive subject matter.

The section on the stolen generations gives a good insight into this difficult issue, presenting the experiences of survivors and the official views of earlier times. A highlight is the powerful painting by Jody Broun entitled *When they went*. It might have been useful to have more of this type of interpretation because the remainder of the section consists largely of panels of text and photographs. The sheer volume of this material is daunting so many visitors do not read it, worthwhile as it is. One must question such reliance on written text in an exhibition based on orally transmitted culture.

Videos and, to a lesser extent, interactive devices bring the material to life in a powerful way, but in the stolen generations' exhibition are physically too removed to enliven the rest of the area. Greater use of video and recorded voices throughout the exhibition would allow layers of meaning and information to be taken off the walls.

In Katta Djinoong the WA Museum tries to do what so few other museums are even willing to attempt—address complicated, painful and conflict-ridden issues with real currency. The negative stories are balanced by insights into many positive and exciting parts of Western Australian Aboriginal histories and cultures. Issues of Aboriginal reconciliation have never been higher on the public agenda, nor more fraught with implications for government. Within Katta Djinoong's generally conventional presentation, the WA Museum is making a signal contribution to national debate.

Denise Cook, freelance curator, and Janey Dolan, masters student, Research Institute for Cultural Heritage, Curtin University, Perth.

When Australia was a Woman: Images of a Nation

Western Australian Museum, now travelling: Queensland Museum, Brisbane, February-April 1999; Fremantle Museum, September 1999.

On 9 May 1901 the first Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia was opened with due pomp in Melbourne's Royal Exhibition Building. Few women were present in an official capacity, and they were overshadowed by luxuriously painted ideal women, including Britannia and her Australian daughters, who soared on the arches beneath the dome. Curiously, the new nation celebrated that day was invariably depicted as feminine, even though women were yet to enjoy the full benefits of citizenship. Herein lies the central paradox and the principal focus of this exhibition.

Australia was not alone in using such imagery, for as Marina Warner has shown, the allegorical conventions established in the ancient world have provided some of the most resilient tropes of Western culture. Particularly persistent has been the use of the female form as an expression of both domestic and civic virtues and desiderata. It is a short conceptual step from abstract virtue to the idealised nation. The exhibition looks at precedents, ancient and modern, for the Australian images—Britannia, and her Graeco-Roman counterpart Athena/Minerva, and also the French Revolutionary Liberty, or Marianne. These well-established precedents are represented by a series of coins, medals and posters, dating from the seventeenth century, when Britannia was invented, to October 1940, when she appeared in full colour on the cover of the *Australian Women's Weekly*.

'When Australia was a Woman' also focuses on issues and events that confronted the new Australia, including the rivalries and tensions causing the colonies to vacillate over Federation, the severing of ties with imperial Britain, race and labour conflicts, 'the woman question' (about women's rights), war, and the siting and cost of the national capital. Most of these continue to have resonance. The exhibition is brought up to date with images of Cheryl Kernot, Joan Kirner et al, but as the catalogue warns, 'allegory which makes use of real women is a very different metaphor'. The allegorical form lost much of its currency by the 1930s, when women were entering the public arena.

Australia-as-a-woman appears in the exhibition in many guises. Often she is a classical maiden in long flowing robes, a perfect foil for the haggard old Britannia so often lampooned from the 1880s. At the time of Federation or the building of Canberra, she is a debutante, or bride, of extravagant ways, bringing the nation to the brink of ruin. In time of war, she is a recruiting agent, or in labour disputes, a modern Marianne. When she campaigns for women's rights and temperance, she becomes as haggard as old Britannia. Her various moods and guises were the creation of male artists and a male-dominated press.

The exhibition draws heavily on political cartoons of the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries, all too few surviving in the original. These cartoons are reproduced, with text, on large panels which lose much of the subtlety of the original drawings by artists such as Montagu Scott, Livingstone Hopkins, Ambrose Dyson and Norman Lindsay. Accompanying these are paintings, prints, photographs, ephemera and (the occasional) sculpture from state and national collections, including the sumptuous *Allegorical Study of New South Wales* by Nicholas Habbé, from the Powerhouse Museum. Other exhibits include Miss Australia robes and tiaras

When Australia Was a Woman, at the Queensland Museum, South Brisbane. In the foreground is a banner from the Australian Workers' Union, Queensland Branch. Photo Jeffrey Wright. Courtesy Queensland Museum.

from the New South Wales organisers of the quest and spectacular banners from Museum Victoria and the Australian Workers' Union Queensland Branch. Regrettably, the Australian War Memorial could provide only reproductions of wartime posters.

Curators Margaret Anderson, Julia Clark and Andrew Reeves are to be congratulated on presenting a refreshing, and often amusing, view of Australian history, and one which puts women on centre stage. The exhibition is accompanied by a fine catalogue of 134 pages, with a comprehensive text and illustrations of most of the works included. It is tragic that an exhibition of such relevance to today's Australia will be seen in only two venues outside Western Australia, due to lack of sponsorship for a wider tour. The catalogue is still available from the Western Australian Museum ($19.95 + postage). A smaller exhibition will be shown at the Fremantle History Museum from September.

Judith McKay
Curator of Applied Arts, Queensland Museum.

National Portrait Gallery
Old Parliament House, Canberra.

The National Portrait Gallery has done a phoenix. It has risen from the ashes of an explosive first career under the aegis of the National Library to a new incarnation as an arm of the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, located in Old Parliament House. Its purpose as stated in the corporate plan is 'to increase understanding and knowledge of portraiture and of Australian history and culture', or as worded in a fact sheet, 'to illustrate Australia's history through its people'.

The people who constitute this picture of Australian history are defined in the 'Policy Guidelines for the Development of the Permanent Collection' as 'important in his or her field of endeavour or a known or named person whose life sets them apart as an individual of long-term public interest', as well as being 'Australian either by birth or association'. There is an implication that people listed in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* would be likely candidates, if their portraits fulfil the other requirements, for the policy guidelines also state the selection criterion that portraits should be of 'sufficient artistic merit'.

How do the first exhibitions at the new NPG delineate Australia's people history? The inaugural show in the old Library offers no explicit overall statement, though works are documented by some 10,000 words of label text about subjects and artists. The layout, however, indicates chronological and occupational categories of noteworthiness.

Since the social character of having a portrait taken was governed in the nineteenth century by possession of sufficient financial and cultural capital, the kinds of people depicted in this timeframe tend to be the well-off middle class. The handful of other images was made largely on account of notoriety: Lola Montez, Ned Kelly and so forth. Some border on the Gothic, such as the decapitated head of Yagan; others are parlour arts, such as Andrew Macredie's volumes of silhouettes of Western District land-holders.

The 20th century is represented by more conventional portraits in the sense of being formal paintings, sculptures and photographs. They are grouped by fame as artists, scientists, business people, sports heroes—the great and the good, with the exception of Alan Bond and perhaps Michael Hutchence. As a serve of Australian history, the show is not really coherent, being informed by neither theory nor theme. But for stickybeak satisfaction, it scores well, evidenced by a constant buzz of visitors.

Does it count as Art? The question hardly matters if it were not for the art-versus-history struggle in the first NPG and the stress on artistic merit in the current policies. Personally, I take the view that all human productions are art, specimens of the creative structuring of matter into meaningful objects. In this light, all images of people have a legitimate place in the NPG, according to the themes of particular exhibitions. Hence I am glad to see the use of all kinds of works in the permanent exhibition, and I am puzzled why such success should not be the rule for acquisitions.

The NPG's first temporary exhibition, 'The Possibilities of Portraiture', aims to explore portraits as 'ideas about what it is to be human', in the words of the introductory label. It seems to me more to concern formal structures: portraits in mirrors, in masks, from many angles, and indeed, in absentia, all of which certainly produce many striking images. Most interesting is a series of thirteen portraits of Mary Gilmore, said in the catalogue to demonstrate that 'the portrait is at least half an art object and half a representation of the subject'. (p.5) What it says to me is that competent artists can depict a consistently recognisable visage. Unexplored is the impact of context on each portrait: why was this portrait made, in what circumstances? To ignore these dimensions is wilful blindness.

The National Portrait Gallery, now an arm of the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, aims to 'increase understanding and knowledge of portraiture and of Australian history and culture'. Courtesy National Portrait Gallery.

It has to be asked: what is the purpose of a national collection of portraits? The form may be archaic in Art, but it annually seizes Australian popular consciousness thanks to the Archibald Prize. Portraits evidently have a vital currency in the broader fields of Australian culture. In my opinion, innate human curiosity drives an essentially voyeuristic urge which is potentially satisfied by images.

But if museums aim to educate as well as entertain, they must engage this passive behaviour into mindfulness, and that requires contextual information. It need not be via long labels; the museum idiom may be carried by numerous media; indeed, the selections of the exhibition itself communicate certain messages. The point is that there must be a purposive mind driving each show. At present, the NPG is caught in an inconsistency between statement and practice that channels its potential into narrow criteria, making it either pointless or self-referential. An Australian NPG deserves more.

Linda Young
Cultural Heritage, Australian National University.

FEEDBACK

A Practical Guide to the Conservation and Care of Collections

As one of the editors of the book *A Practical Guide to the Conservation and Care of Collections* I appreciated the generally favourable comments made by Zoe McKenzie in her review of this publication (*Museum National*, May 1999). I do feel, however, that some of her more critical comments deserve a response.

The book was designed for all collectors, not just for those associated with small museums, historical societies and the like. This is an important point as the bulk of Australia's movable cultural heritage is in private hands. It was also designed, as stated in the Foreword, to be used 'in conjunction with continuing cooperation between conservation professionals and collectors' and 'is not intended to be the definitive conservation manual'. As the title implies, the book was designed to provide practical advice to collectors, leaving the wider field of collections management for other publications.

Of major concern to Zoe appears to be the provision of treatment information to the lay public. This is an important ethical issue that was discussed at length by the contributors before it was decided to incorporate such information in the text. We felt it was preferable to provide basic treatment information, accompanied by provisos regarding the necessity or otherwise of treatments and of the need to consult with conservators, rather than allow collectors to remain in the dark about such matters.

Zoe harbours 'concerns for the workers in small museums, volunteers for the most part, and their use of this publication as anything other than a reference tool'. An interesting comment bearing in mind that the book was written in the hope that it would be used for precisely this purpose.

A further concern is the lack of any discussion as to why an object should be considered for conservation or restoration. Chapter 3 (General points on artefact treatments) deals with this issue, discussing briefly the need to assess the nature and significance of materials before treatment, whether objects should be conserved or restored and highlighting the relevant section of the *AICCM Code of Ethics* that covers restoration.

Zoe also considers that the question of why museums need to 'fix' things, is not addressed in the text, stating that 'In many cases collections would not require the level of treatment detailed in the book if they had been better housed and cared for in the first place, with the museum rigorously acting within the guidelines of a defined collections policy'. As similar sentiments were expressed in the first sentence of the book and repeated in Chapter 3, I was somewhat bemused by this comment.

I do not consider that this book should, as Zoe put it, be handled with caution. Nor do I consider that advice regarding consultation with a conservator should be 'capitalised, bolded and placed at the beginning of each chapter' – all very dramatic. This advice is provided in most Summary sections, and also in the sections dealing with treatments for most chapters, the most appropriate context in which such advice should be placed. Indeed an external referee felt that there were too many such warnings throughout the text!

In many circles conservation professionals are viewed as 'being in the no', spending more time telling collectors what they shouldn't be doing rather than providing a more balanced view on what can and also what should be done to prevent damage and to stabilise deteriorating objects. It is time that collectors and those responsible for collections were credited with having the intelligence to read, interpret, evaluate and apply knowledge that is made available to them. Conservators should not be the arbitrary censors of information vital to the preservation and stabilisation of collections.

I realise I have been somewhat laboured in my response but feel that the many positives associated with the book may have been clouded by Zoe's concerns related to the treatment information provided in the text, a provision from which I do not resile. The main thrust of the review is, however, of considerable interest to those responsible for collections and hopefully will stimulate further debate on the issue of supplying technical information to the general public.

Dr Ian Godfrey
Curator, Department of Materials Conservation, WA Museum

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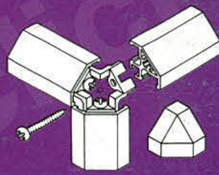

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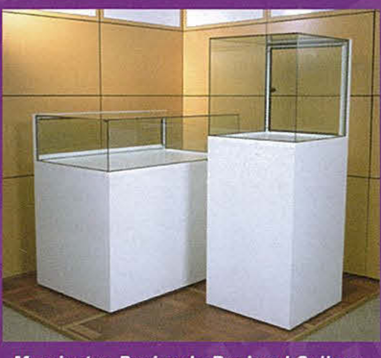

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