

CURIO

Adelaide Journal
of Curatorial and
Heritage Practice

Volume 1

Issue 1 | May 2025

Reclaiming Heritage Issue

Opinion

Greg Mackie on Curating the
Curator in 21st century museums

Exhibitions

Entwined Student Exhibition
Archie Moore's Dwelling Series

South Australian Museum

Benin Bronzes

Reviews

AMaGA National Conference
Reclaiming Heritage Symposium





CURIO Volume 1 | Issue 1 | May 2025

Society of Curatorial and Heritage Practice

The University of Adelaide

<https://able.adelaide.edu.au/humanities/research/curio-adelaide-journal-of-curatorial-and-heritage-practice>

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Kaurna people, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we research, write, and engage with curatorial and heritage practices. We recognise the Kaurna people's enduring connection to Country and the rich cultural heritage that has been preserved and passed down through generations. As a journal dedicated to curatorial and heritage practice, we value Indigenous knowledge systems and the importance of First Nations perspectives in shaping how histories, objects, and places are cared for and interpreted. We pay our respects to Kaurna Elders past, present, and emerging.

Welcome to CURIO

...the inaugural issue of the Adelaide Journal of Curatorial and Heritage Practice. The aim of the Journal is to provide post-graduate students with an open-access platform for publishing research in the humanities and related disciplines; and to provide post-graduate students with experience in publishing their academic work. It has a particular emphasis on scholarship from Museum and Curatorial Studies, Art History, Heritage studies and related areas of research.

In May 2024, a call-out to the student body was answered by a small group of post graduate students to initiate a journal. Dr Ainoa Cabada from the School of Social Sciences in the Faculty of Arts, Business, Law and Economics ABLE, and Thomas Bowden at The University of Adelaide provided valuable advice given their experience in establishing similar journals. In October, the School of Humanities supported the proposal, and the Formative Sub-committee moved to establish the Editorial Board for CURIO in late 2024.

We wish to acknowledge the support from the School and stewardship from the staff at The University of Adelaide, in particular Dr Ania Kotarba (Past Course Co-ordinator, Museum and Curatorial Studies), Professor Andrew van der Vlies (Head of School of Humanities, ABLE), Associate Professor Dr Tim Legrand ABLE, Professor Jodie Conduit ABLE and the Marketing and Communications Co-ordinator in assisting with the establishment of CURIO's webpage on the School of Humanities website.

We would also like to thank all contributors to this first issue and encourage post-graduate students in Humanities to consider publishing in the Journal as an early stepping stone to their future careers. Because this was, and is, the main purpose of the Journal.

<https://able.adelaide.edu.au/humanities/research/curio-adelaide-journal-of-curatorial-and-heritage-practice>

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Editorial

BOARD



Susan Millbank

completed a Graduate Diploma in Museum and Curatorial Studies at The University of Adelaide in 2024 and is hoping to finish her Master thesis before The University of Adelaide becomes Adelaide

University. After graduating with a B.A. (Hons) in History in 1982, when an electric typewriter was the all-new technology, she spent over 40 years in the public sector. Working through the introduction of fax machines, word processors, emails, internet and intranets, electronic document transfer, mobile phones, and the list goes on, Sue thinks she has come to grips with a good slice of modern life but is clear that for her, social media will always be a struggle zone.

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Across all these disciplines she has followed an interest

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Jaquie Hagan

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UniSA 2006, and an Advanced Diploma of Visual Communication from DMIT 1997. Jaquie is completing a Master of Curatorial and Museum Studies at The University of Adelaide with a focus on curatorial and exhibition design. Her thesis explores how truth telling through exhibition can reframe colonial legacies in Australian universities. She is the creator of the CURIO brand and journal design. Jaquie works casually at Samstag Museum of Art following an internship in 2024.

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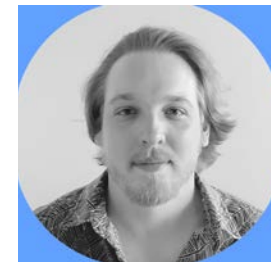


Lauren Elizabeth Wallis

is a secondary school teacher with a background in History and English, having completed a Bachelor of Teaching/Arts double degree at The University of Adelaide in 2019. In 2024, she earned

a Master's degree in Curatorial and Museum Studies and has now commenced a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Human Society. Lauren's PhD research explores how historical house museums in Australia bridge domestic history and museological practice, particularly through their architecture, gardens, furnishings, and art collections. Passionate about education, engagement, and the arts, she combines her academic and teaching experience to examine how these museums preserve and interpret domestic life for contemporary audiences.

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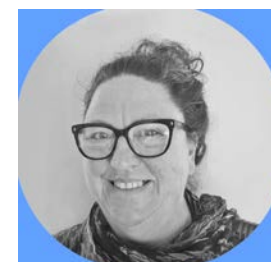


John Bowman Craig

is a recent graduate from the Masters of Museum and Curatorial Studies program at The University of Adelaide, having completed his thesis in November of 2024. John is a musician and sound designer, and leverages his

background in anthropology to offer grounded and informed audio consultation and content production services within the GLAM sector. His thesis, a cross-disciplinary analysis of audio production & implementation practices between the video game and museum industries, includes the identification of applicable audio concepts, and a practical toolset aimed at assisting museum professionals in the ideation of audio elements within the curatorial process. Updates on John's current projects can be found on his website.

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Wendy Rushbrook

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Wendy lives on the Yorke

Peninsula, recently retired as a teacher and loves all things to do with books, libraries and museums. She recently completed an internship in the South Australian Museum's library reviewing the journal collection. Wendy was once the editor of the *Permaculture SA* journal and the family's permaculture designed garden is full of fruit trees, vegetables and poultry. She has a varied work history including builder's labourer, camel safari cook and was once charged by a water buffalo.

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repatriation, and climate change impacts on cultural landscapes. She is an archaeologist and cultural heritage professional with extensive experience collaborating with Indigenous communities and museums on ethical collections management, heritage protection policies, and digital curation. Ania is committed to advancing critical museum practice and fostering dialogue between academia and the sector. As a member of CURIO's Editorial Board, Ania represents University Staff and supports emerging scholarship in curatorial and museum studies.

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Editorial

MESSAGE

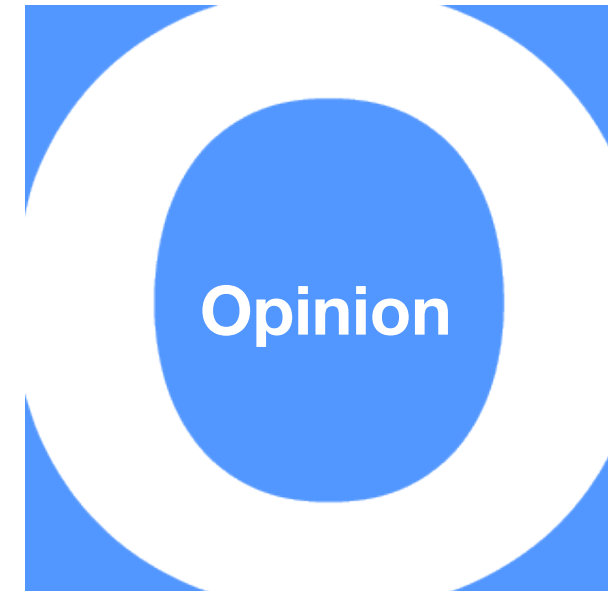
In this our inaugural issue, we are very grateful to the CEO of the History Trust of South Australia, Greg Mackie for his thought provoking opinion piece about the future directions for museums. This timely piece highlights the ever-expanding toolkit required by the 21st century museum curator and is a welcomed prelude to CURIO's selection of complementary articles which speak to the significance and complexities of engaging with cultural heritage. The assemblage of such articles has been undertaken with considered purpose to coincide with the recent Reclaiming Heritage Symposium, spearheaded by Past Course Coordinator of Museum and Curatorial Studies at The University of Adelaide, Dr Ania Kotarba in collaboration with Aboriginal Heritage and Repatriation Manager at the South Australian Museum (SAM), Anna Russo.

Repatriation and restitution are important issues for museums today. It has a direct relationship to decolonisation, collecting ethics, cultural heritage, preservation, past crimes, the stories we tell, and the implications for places of origin. It conveys our past - in that we revisit pre-colonial and colonial times and colonisation history and remember or discover its artefacts and culture. Repatriation also makes our future. It focusses attention on museums for the twenty-first century and how institutions need to adapt to survive the challenges brought on by collections management, repatriation, priorities and funding shortfalls. It brings us to why history matters, and why museums matter. Reinventing for contemporary audiences can reinvigorate the sector and encourage creative exhibition spaces which in turn has the capacity to engage new audiences. And this is important, because museums are repositories of our humanity - our relationships, our way of life, our worldview, our connection with the Earth, and our hopes for the future.

This issue includes articles and reviews on how the past is being adapted for the future - from the medium of porcelain, to exhibitions, and the symbolism of significant cultural artefacts and repatriation of cultural heritage. Abstracts of theses from 2024/25 Master students in the Museum and Curatorial Heritage program at The University of Adelaide have a focus on educational experiences, the foundations of the University, collections management, innovations in technology, preservation, and providing experiences for new and diverse audiences.

We hope this issue cultivates your interest in curatorial and heritage practice and its emerging practitioners. We also welcome your feedback so that future issues can reflect contemporary concerns within the industry.

CURIO
Editorial Board



Curating the Curator

These reflections come after almost 40 years as a practitioner of cultural development, and the last decade leading the History Trust of South Australia, a unique statutory authority whose purposes include promoting South Australia's unique social history, operating a series of niche museums, and providing assistance to a statewide network of local museums and historical societies.

When I commenced my leadership role with The History Trust in May 2016, it came under the ministerial delegation of the Minister for the Arts. Having previously journeyed 20+ years as an independent bookseller and cultural entrepreneur, long public service followed as head of Arts SA, then Deputy Chief Executive in Premier and Cabinet and as a cultural development consultant. In 2018 the History Trust was moved from the arts portfolio to the ministerial delegation of the Minister for Education, creating the opportunity to see its mission through different lenses.

The advent and proliferation of digital platforms called for integrated design approaches to the curatorial efforts of museum and history professionals. Back in the emerging years of our digital world, closed-system online collection management platforms were initially the basis upon which information was assembled, replacing analogue paper-based archival systems - in essence, the 'tools of the trade'.

From collections management to marketing and promotion, the advent of high-speed and high-resolution digital platforms, and social media, the medium at times becomes the message (to paraphrase Marshall McLuhan). The proliferation of data management and its now inexorable progression to the realities of information, knowledge and wisdom sharing has transformed the means of storytelling. In so doing, the specialist nature of object discovery/acquisition, provenance and contextual research and interpretation now demands a more integrated storytelling approach to object curation and exhibition planning. In essence, the successful 21st century curator now needs additional capabilities and engagement competencies in their toolkit to more successfully realise their mission. Integrated design approaches take more things into account from the outset, and not least of these is having the highest regard for the intended audience and their experience - both in-gallery and online.

“... the once unassailable pre-eminence of ‘the curator’ as a ‘high priest’ of museology has demanded a re-think.”

The ever-diminishing working capital available to curators in the modern publicly-funded and operated world of museums has meant that the once unassailable pre-eminence of ‘the curator’ as a ‘high priest’ of museology has demanded a re-think. From the get-go, the curator must now think and plan having regard to the senses and sentience of their intended audience, and from the outset, be cognisant of integrated engagement with marketing, education, digital design, and framing their knowledge-sharing and story-telling. Rather than a diminution, integrated design thinking, when applied to exhibition design and collection curation leads to better outcomes. The true winner becomes the audience.

Greg Mackie OAM
CEO of History Trust of South Australia



string culture

In the second semester of 2023, the Curatorial and Museum Studies Program at The University of Adelaide offered a unique course that gave us, the students, the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in the development and production of a professional-level exhibition from start to finish. The course, titled *The Exhibition: Concept, Design, and Delivery*, covered all aspects of the exhibition production process within the timespan of a single semester. Everything from researching the topic and materials, the curation of objects and narratives, and designing visitor experiences, to communicating with stakeholders, managing a budget, and the installation of exhibition materials was performed by students under the advisement of industry professionals.

By John Bowman Craig,
Nicola Butler & Kansas Bird

Figure 1. *Entwined* exhibition entrance
Image: Andy Stevens, courtesy
The University of Adelaide

Student acknowledgements
Abby Pumpa
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Jaquie Hagan
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Yi Hu

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Amy Dale
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Jeremy Green
Professor John Carty
Dr Robyn Makenzie

The exhibition was set to feature the story of Honor Maude (Figure 2) and showcase items from the Pacific Collection housed in the University's Barr Smith Library, which was acquired from the donation of Harry and Honor Maude's personal library in 1972. Honor Maude was a prominent figure in the collection and study of string figures, sometimes referred to as string games or cat's cradles, particularly of the island nations of Micronesia. Honor's husband, Harry, was a British civil servant, originally stationed on Kiribati in 1929. Nevertheless, the two would travel between various South Pacific islands for the next twenty-five years. Sharing an interest in anthropology, the pair would observe and study the culture wherever they found themselves. Honor, however, found a particular passion in the study of string figures, which was a common cultural practice between the peoples of the islands she would visit. She began to document the string figures she encountered, and not just the completed figure, but the process of making the figure and the stories, songs, and names attached to them, recognising the value of the figures as a cultural performance, a living object, and an intangible heritage.

“When it comes to making string figures, the Nauruans are world champs.”

– Honor Maude

In her work, Honor collected hundreds of novel string figures, recorded the steps to their creation in a notation adapted from previous publications of string figures recorded by anthropologist A.C. Haddon, and compared their features as a shared art between separate but related cultures. Her interest in string figures even reignited string figures as a point of cultural identity for the people of Nauru. Honor would go on to publish several collections of her work with specific cultures, as well as assist in other researcher's publications, earning her a reputation as a foremost figure in the study of string figures. After moving to Canberra in the early 1960s Honor would become a founding member of the *International String Figure Association* in 1978, which continues to this day.



Figure 2. *Honor Maude* panel showing *Honor performing the Administration Staffs string figure*, ca. 1960's
Image: Andy Stevens, courtesy The University of Adelaide



Figure 3. Examples of string figure shapes of the world
Image: Andy Stevens, courtesy The University of Adelaide

Stakeholders and communication

To help process the incredible story of Honor Maude and the materials of the Pacific collection into an accessible exhibition narrative, the students consulted with ANU researcher Dr. Robyn McKenzie, who provided much-needed context and insights into Honor's life and continued legacy within the study of string figures. From this consultation, research, and extensive discussion, we began to form the central idea of the exhibition. We decided to place Honor's story within the larger context of string figures as a global phenomenon; showcasing examples of string figure culture from around the world (Figure 3), while elevating her insights and research as opening a window into the study and appreciation of string figures as a creative art and social activity. Within her story we highlighted her impact on the study of string figures, contributing to the field of anthropology as a female in the early 20th century, and her relationship with the peoples of the islands she visited. With this, we titled the exhibition *Entwined: String Games Across Cultures* (Figure 1).

After deciding on this central narrative, we volunteered for various responsibilities in the practical production of the exhibition, often leveraging existing skill sets and strengths. Even with fifteen students, the tight production time frame meant that students took on multiple responsibilities and were exposed to many different aspects of the production experience. In this article we would like to reflect on a few of those aspects of the exhibitions production, express some of the challenges we faced, and skills we gained in overcoming those challenges.

Stakeholder and contributor communication was one area we wanted to pay particular attention to throughout the production of the exhibition. Early in the production process we investigated and established communications with the Maude family (Figure 4 & 5), as well as PICSA, the Pacific Islands Council of South Australia. We also held a close relationship with the Barr Smith Library as both the keepers of the collection and the providers of the physical exhibition space.

There was also a significant amount of content from outside the Pacific collection that required usage requests and negotiations. The exhibition featured two videos comprised of multiple individual clips and images, each requiring some form of rights clearance process, and sometimes involving considerable searching for current contact information. In the end, this effort was rewarded not only by knowing we had done our due diligence, but also by allowing for a more diverse range of content within the exhibition.



Figure 4. The extended Maude family at the exhibition launch
Image: Andy Stevens, courtesy The University of Adelaide

Working with the collection

The group tasked with research and object selection collated material from the Pacific Collection to form the backbone of the curatorial content. After going through and creating a reference catalogue of all of the items in the collection, we thought collaboratively about an overall theme and certain highlights, as well as how these objects could be effectively displayed. This proved to be more complicated than initially anticipated, as the collection consists almost entirely of paper artefacts such as letters, hand-written research, and string figure instruction books. As a class, we discussed how best to go about using this two-dimensional, paper collection to excite and inform the public about a very fluid and communicative cultural practice in which performance is a critical facet.



Figure 5. Honor Maude's son, Alaric Maude at the exhibition launch
Image: Andy Stevens, courtesy The University of Adelaide

It was decided that, as well as presenting letters, photographs, and books from the collection in display cases, there would also be a video on loop to demonstrate to visitors how string figures are performed as well as the ways in which they have been featured in popular culture (Figure 6).

The object selection process meant thinking critically about each item in the collection and what topics we believed should be brought to the fore. A section on Honor Maude's publishing house, Homa Press, saw finished copies of her books displayed next to earlier drafts showing her working process and letters to libraries about the stocking of her publications.



Figure 6. Display cases housing letters, photographs & books with video loop in background
Image: Jaquie Hagan

Our instructors encouraged us to consider the importance of knowing which visitor demographics we were catering for, as well as who would be in the vicinity of the exhibition space and who the university and course stakeholders were. These factors influenced both the content and complexity of the information on display, as well as which age groups would be targeted for public programming events.

As there was such a short timeline for the curation of this exhibition, it meant that processes like research and object selection had to progress alongside exhibition layout and design. How do you create a thought-provoking and logical floor plan for an exhibition which doesn't have any objects yet? This required extensive communication between the research and the design groups and working with a more holistic and simultaneous approach. We considered the flow of the narrative and how we wanted visitors to move around in the space; how to introduce the topic and in which order we wanted to showcase the most important aspects. This led to the exhibition space's main areas being divided and themed before we knew what exactly would be on display.

In some ways this structure helped, as having a strict quota of space for each topic placed emphasis on effective object selection in order to reinforce the designed visitor experience.

We thought about how to make the exhibition space look appealing for passers by who could be potential visitors. This, combined with the restriction of not having enough transportable walls to divide the room completely, led to the idea of creating wall-sized string figures from coloured rope, and hanging them vertically as room dividers. This way, visitors could see through the divider into the latter sections of the exhibition, while also being guided along the path as designed (Figure 7).

“...it was a performance which manifested all that we had learned during our study of this cultural phenomenon.”

In order to practically create these larger-than-life string figures, students from the course had to each play the part of one finger and weave the rope over and under each other to create the final pattern. As this was attempted in the final stages of the exhibition install (Figure 8 & 9), and therefore the final stages of the course itself, it was a performance which manifested all that we had learned during our study of this cultural phenomenon, as well as the bonds that had grown while working together on this project.

“...learning about the many various roles that string figures can play in cultural exchange, we had all become quite passionate about the topic.”

As a group we also had the task of writing and editing the information panels and the object labels, which was a lesson in concise and informative writing. We took all of the information and research from the twelve-week course and distilled it into one, short, information panel for each themed section. The object labels had to be even more concise, no longer than two or three sentences each. After working on this project and learning about the many various roles that string figures can play in cultural exchange, we had all become quite passionate about the topic, and this made cutting information back down to the most important aspects a challenging operation. These object labels had to summarise and contextualise the information we were highlighting from letters or the open pages of books, while also displaying the object's collection number and reference information (Figure 10).

The information panels and object labels went through many drafts and changes, each one being proof-read by multiple members of the class to eliminate the chance of spelling or grammatical errors. When Dr. Robyn McKenzie returned to Adelaide after her initial consultation months before to be present at the opening night of the exhibition, she commented positively on the decisions behind interpretation and object selection, referencing the inclusion of the Homa Press materials as a highlight.

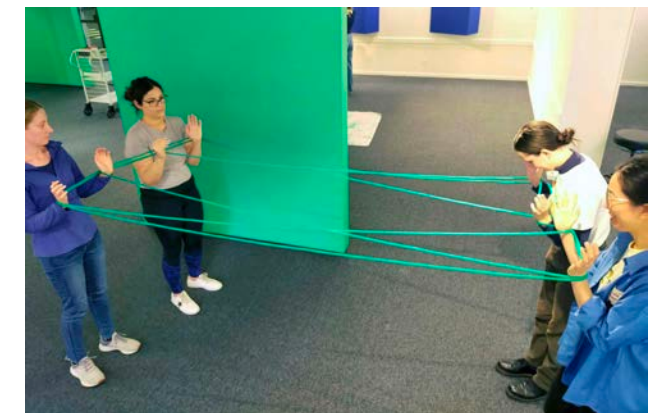


Figure 8. Students acting as fingers to make life-sized string figure
Image: Sara Kennewell



Figure 9. Students installing life-sized string figure divider
Image: Prof John Carty

International String Figures Association Bulletin

Volume 3, 1996

This 'Letters to the Editor' section includes a photo of Maude with a patient at the Margaret Reid Orthopaedic Hospital in St. Ives, NSW. At the time, the hospital was for children who suffered from physical disabilities and the playing of string games was a way for them to keep entertained during prolonged stays.

Bulletin of the International String Figures Association, Volume 3, Pasadena, California, 1996. Pacific Collection 793.905 B9373

Figure 10. Object label for ISFA Bulletin
Image: Jaquie Hagan



Figure 7. Looking through the life-sized string figure divider
Image: Andy Stevens, courtesy The University of Adelaide

Cultural sensitivity and accessibility

Two elements of the exhibition that were key focuses of design were ensuring cultural sensitivity towards how we depicted the cultures discussed, and providing accessibility for those who would be visiting the exhibition.

Something we needed to be extremely mindful of was our depiction of the Pacific, the people who lived there in the past, and those who continue to live there today. The Pacific comprises numerous cultures with widely varied practices and relationships towards string figures, meaning that we had to be deliberate in not implying that Pacific cultures are monolithic. This was mainly an issue when deciding which books would be put on display, as many of them were written from the perspectives of white people and/or colonisers of the Pacific. While these authors may have been well-meaning in how they discussed Pacific cultures, we had to be clear that we were not treating these authors as experts when compared to writings by actual Pacific Islanders.

Many of these texts also used names for lands and cultural groups which are now understood to be outdated or even extremely offensive in some cases.

For example, one section of the exhibition discussed an Inuit string figure, the Mammoth, however the text which we referenced used a racial slur rather than the word 'Inuit'. Due to some of these books having genuinely useful information for the exhibition that could not be found elsewhere, we made the decision to include these texts but included a warning at the beginning of the exhibition (Figure 11). We also placed an Acknowledgement of Country at the beginning of the exhibition near the entrance (Figure 12).

Cultural sensitivity warning

Visitors are advised that this exhibition contains discussions of colonialism as it relates to many countries. Due to the historic nature of some texts which have been utilised, outdated and offensive language regarding Indigenous peoples may be featured. The colonial names of countries will also be mentioned but relevant labels will clarify the correct names to avoid confusion.

We encourage visitors to take notice of these differences in language and to reflect on their importance.

Figure 11. Cultural sensitivity warning panel inside entry
Image: Jaquie Hagan

Acknowledgement of Country

The Master of Curatorial and Museum Studies students and staff would like to acknowledge that the 'Entwined' exhibition was researched and produced on Kaurna Country. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging, and extend that respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who visit the exhibition.

Figure 12. Acknowledgement of Country panel inside entry
Image: Jaquie Hagan

Cultural sensitivity warning

Visitors are advised that the following exhibition contains the names, voices and images of people who have passed away.

Figure 13. Panel outside exhibition
Image: Jaquie Hagan

As some of the archival footage used in the exhibition was confirmed to contain images and audio of an Aboriginal man, we also included a warning outside of the entrance to the exhibition, so that visitors were warned before entering the exhibition (Figure 13).

In order to ensure accessibility where we could - with the understanding that we could not change the location of the space or the surrounding building - we mainly focussed on making all of the text and objects as legible as possible. The main focus of this was to be inclusive of people with different heights or who may be using wheelchairs. Primarily this meant having objects and text visible from a variety of angles, but it also meant being considerate of lighting and glare that might reflect off of the Mylar or glass display enclosures at different heights.

Glare was ultimately unavoidable as lighting cannot be catered to every potential height, but was something we kept in mind when positioning both the lighting and the display cases (Figure 14). We also discussed different font options which would be the most legible for people with dyslexia or visual impairment.

On the opening night of the exhibition, some of us were approached by a guest using a wheelchair who expressed that she was appreciative that the display cases were at a level that she could see the objects. We are not aware of how many visitors to the exhibition may have had a disability that impacted the way they experienced the exhibition, but having this very positive interaction at the first viewing was encouraging that we had made effective choices in our design.



Figure 14. Display cases & interpretative material at accessible heights
Image: Andy Stevens, courtesy The University of Adelaide



Figure 15. Students and staff from The Exhibition Concept course
Image: Andy Stevens, courtesy The University of Adelaide

Entwined: String Games Across Cultures launched on November 3rd of 2023, on schedule, and as a fully realised exhibition within the Barr Smith Library - running until March 28th 2024. While challenging, we left the course with a wealth of practical lessons and experience and the accomplishment of being a part of the creation of a professional-level exhibition. For the students (Figure 15), this was an invaluable opportunity and a defining feature of our experience with the Curatorial and Museum Studies program. We consider it crucial that opportunities like this are available, especially with the wealth of industry expertise found in local Adelaide cultural institutions. Furthermore, the upcoming Adelaide University presents an opportunity for such a course and indeed the program itself to flourish and expand with the merging of resources and networks in the local cultural industry.



Shapes of the world string figures incorporating elements of public programming activities
Image: Andy Stevens, courtesy The University of Adelaide



Public programming, Play & Learn area with string, instruction cards and video tutorials
Image: Jaquie Hagan



Universal string figure games and toys from around the world
Image: Andy Stevens, courtesy The University of Adelaide

Dwelling

IN MEMORY

A curatorial statement on *Dwelling* (Adelaide Issue)
Archie Moore's 5th iteration of his *Dwelling* series
at Samstag Museum of Art – By Jaquie Hagan

It was somewhat fortuitous that the timing of my internship at Samstag coincided with the implementation and installation of Archie Moore's *Dwelling* exhibition. The task of building a full-scale house replicating Moore's memory of his childhood home within a gallery space is a formidable challenge. A challenge that requires diverse skill sets, a host of contributors and years of work by Samstag curators. Having the opportunity to work with a celebrated Australian artist (fresh from a seminal win at the Venice Biennale) was, at surface level a daunting endeavour. But moving beyond my self imposed "imposter syndrome", I was able to deep dive into the exhibition process and make a valuable contribution to such a consequential work. Gaining pertinent curatorial insights while drawing on my interior architecture and design expertise was indeed a major coup, forging a memory which I myself will dwell in for some time to come.

"I wanted to make people forget they were in a gallery and get into a real domestic space or into a memory. That's an ongoing motif in my work; I'm trying to put the viewer in my shoes."

— Archie Moore
(Hopkinson 2022, p. 94)

I first met Kamilaroi / Bigambul artist Archie Moore midway during my internship following the initial planning stages at Samstag. On first impressions Moore was unassuming, humble and softly spoken, not at all befitting of an acclaimed Venice Biennale Golden Lion recipient! It was a pleasantry I was delighted to linger in, instantly disabling any pre-conceived ideas I had acquired about "rock-star" artists. As our interactions grew throughout the exhibition process, what emerged (to me) was an incredibly insightful human whose introverted nature is perhaps his "super power" — precipitating his adeptness in quietly observing the world through an incredibly nuanced lens. A medium enabling him to articulate his experience as an Indigenous Australian through the granular and sensory essence of memory.

"Memory has been in all of my work somewhere. I'm still intrigued by who I am, what I think I am, and the reasons why."

— Archie Moore
(Hill 2015, p. 30)

Moore's relationship with *Dwelling* was first realised in 2010 with a site-specific installation at Accidentally Annie Street Space, a Brisbane based artist run initiative. Here Moore created a series of room installations in a pre-existing domestic house using a collection of readymade "Duchampian" personal and found objects. The status of these everyday objects, furniture, decor and their visual, auditory, haptic and olfactory qualities appear elevated within the staged exhibition environment — their imbued memory and interpretation amplified (Morrell 2012, pp. 98-99).

Figure 1 previous page. *Dwelling* (Adelaide Issue) from above
Image: Sia Duff, courtesy Samstag Museum of Art

Dwelling continued to evolve over the next 14 years with subsequent exhibitions, the second being *Archie Moore 1970–2018* in 2018 at Griffith University Art Museum Brisbane, followed by *HouseShow* in 2020 at The Cottage West End Brisbane, and more recently *Dwelling* (Victorian Issue) in 2022 at Gertrude Contemporary Melbourne. In *Dwelling* (Adelaide Issue) like in earlier iterations, Moore invites audiences to share in autobiographical experiences that have contributed to the evocation of memory of his childhood home. As Moore explains, he is interested in “this idea of shared experience or being in one’s shoes, or, more accurately, the unverifiability of knowing if another person’s experience is the same as your own” (Hill 2015, p. 30). This speaks more deeply to the failure of reconciliation as Moore reflects on “the uncertainty of non-white and white people ever understanding each other, or ever having a sense of empathy for each other” (Hill 2015, p. 30).

Moore’s exploration of memory is a reoccurring poignant motif which evolves over time. During my time at Samstag, Moore would often talk about memory both in person and throughout artist talks. He would continually reference the fallibility of memory and his fascination with the cognitive recall of a memory — that engaging in the act of recall would in itself alter the memory each time. This imbues even richer meaning when Moore explains how a number of his memories were formed — from stories he was told as a child or from viewing family photos which through association contributed to a memory that he would have previously been too young to remember himself (Hagan, personal communication, 24 October 2024). This concept is embedded throughout Moore’s *Dwelling* series as each iteration is subtly altered from the last, layered with new interpretations of memory to explore.

“When I was younger, I was locked in an old fridge, though I don’t have any recollection of it. I’m remembering the story rather than the event — memory is a fallible thing.”

— Archie Moore
(Samstag 2024)



Figure 2. Teenage sketch by Archie Moore, *Dwelling* (Adelaide Issue), Image: Jaquie Hagan



Figure 3. Father’s belongings located in dresser, *Dwelling* (Adelaide Issue), Image: Sia Duff, courtesy Samstag Museum of Art

Exploration is a key component to Moore’s *Dwelling* work. There are no “do not touch” signs here. Audiences are encouraged to touch, feel, sense and absorb through atmospheric exploration. A number of the items in the exhibition are indeed Moore’s own personal belongings offering a privileged window into Moore’s inner monologue. A collection of expressive teenage sketches tacked to his bedroom wall, art pieces in their own right (Figure 2) are complemented by his collection of MAD magazines and mixed tapes playing the songs that defined his youth (Figure 4). Further afield in a lean-to room at the rear of the house (where his father resided) are his father’s defence service records and medals amongst a collection of Communist propaganda, providing insight into his father’s political alignment (Figure 3). Not all of these items are out on display but sitting within dresser drawers, behind doors or underfoot. Inquisitive? Look closer, be adventurous and reap the rewards.



Figure 4. Archie Moore’s bedroom, *Dwelling* (Adelaide Issue) Image: Sia Duff, courtesy Samstag Museum of Art

During the exhibition install at Samstag, Moore eluded to an intentional obscuring of objects — suggesting that if the audience is prepared to do the work and engage more deeply with the exhibition they may discover some treasures (Hagan, personal communication, 8 October 2024). In addition, the quiet unassuming objects are often the ones that reveal the most, inviting insight into Moore’s psyche and indeed his self-deprecating humour. Situated just inside the front entrance to *Dwelling* and easily overlooked once enticed by the visual tapestry of Moore’s bedroom is a letter addressed to Moore from the *Golden Casket Lottery Corporation Limited* with an attached cheque for \$1.20 (Figure 5). This understated object and its inconsequential placement recapitulates Moore’s quiet interpretation of the human experience.

“Humour relieves the psychological tension in your brain and abates or disengages you from power structures. It is fairly absurd to send a cheque for \$1.20 as that amount may be the cost of cashing it in.”

— Archie Moore
(Lettau 2022)

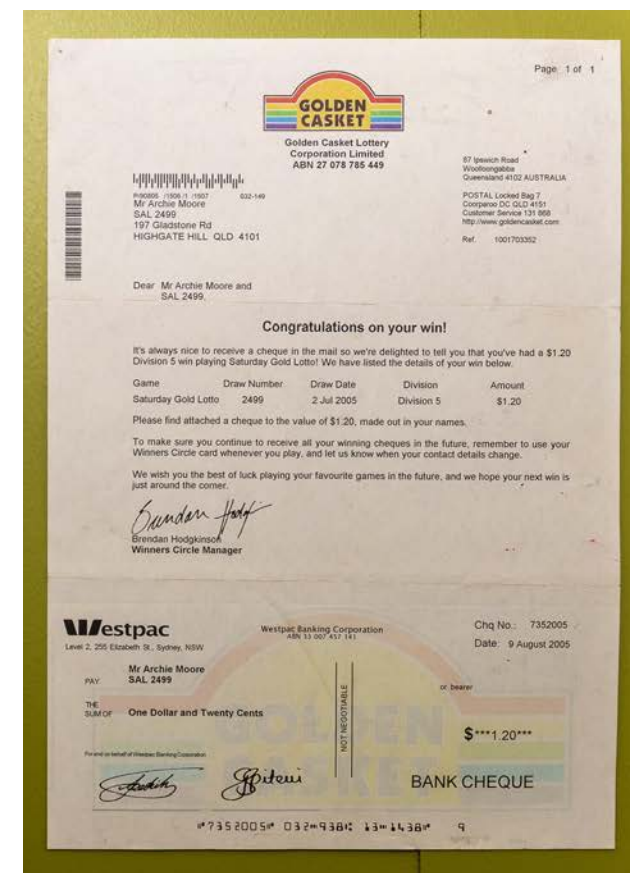


Figure 5. Letter with lottery ticket winnings, *Dwelling* (Adelaide Issue), Image: Sia Duff, courtesy Samstag Museum of Art

In stark contrast but equally engaging are the audio visual installations. *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)* is a commission between the Adelaide Film Festival and Samstag Museum of Art. A point of difference in the *Adelaide Issue* is the additional moving image installations. This is most concentrated within the kitchen area which incorporates a handful of individual moving image components (Figure 6). Upon entering the kitchen an enhanced projection of a 1950s linoleum pattern can be found underfoot (Figure 15), reminiscent of flooring in the run-down fibro cottage of Moore’s childhood home. Born to an Indigenous mother and white father, Moore grew up in Tara, a small Queensland town with a population of around 800. Moore’s family was one of only two Indigenous families in town where racist attitudes influenced Moore’s denial of his cultural heritage (Hill 2018).

“I rarely left the house. I preferred being inside its ugliness to the ugliness of racism outside its walls.”
— Archie Moore
(Lettau 2022)

Central to the kitchen is the table setting depicting hands preparing food projected directly onto physical crockery. The meal consists of white bread, milk, tea and sugar which speaks to the intergenerational disadvantage Indigenous families endured — influencing diet and health outcomes.



Figure 6. Kitchen with moving image installations on table and fridge, *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)*
Image: Sia Duff, courtesy Samstag Museum of Art



Figure 7. Cockroach moving image in kitchen drawer, *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)*, Image: Jaquie Hagan



Figure 8. Bathtub with Dettol water, *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)*
Image: Sia Duff, courtesy Samstag Museum of Art

Behind the table sits an old kitchen cabinet housing another moving image installation within its drawer. Should the audience be curious they will be confronted with the discovery of a writhing digital cockroach within (Figure 7). Of his childhood home Moore recalls how “the kitchen ceiling and fibro walls were covered in black smoke from the wood stove. Every crack had a cockroach in it” (Lettau 2022). Perhaps the most compelling moving image in the kitchen is the projection of a small boy locked inside the fridge. As referenced previously, this recreates Moore’s memory or collective memory as told to him by family members. Moore has used auditory in previous iterations of *Dwelling* to convey this memory in the fridge. To realise this memory for the *Adelaide Issue* the moving image footage was filmed onsite in the gallery during installation (Figure 13).

Moore strives to invite additional sensory activation beyond the visual and auditory responses associated with moving image. Through introducing olfactory stimulation into his work, he offers audiences an enhanced sensory experience.

In conversation with Samstag associate curator Anna Zagala, Moore articulated the rationale behind using olfactory elements in his work as a trigger for memory — explaining that the part of the brain that decodes smell is located close to where long term memories are stored (On Art 2022). Moore puts this into practice in the *Adelaide Issue* and selected *Dwelling* iterations, with the use of Dettol mixed into the bath water (Figure 8). Dettol has such a distinctive smell that anyone who grew up in the latter half of the 20th Century would instantly recognise and in turn evoke their own associations. For Moore the relationship with Dettol is a profound one with perceived consequences as an Indigenous Australian.

“It represents for me the fear my mother had of having her children ‘taken away’ — if we weren’t looked after, clean enough.”
— Archie Moore
(Lettau 2022)

¹ There were four final drawings I produced for the installation detailing the layout & objects, dimensions, location within the gallery and construction detail. In addition I produced two accessibility and sensory maps for the gallery

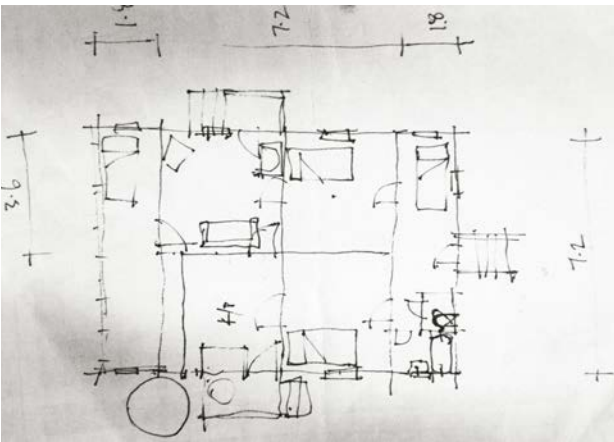


Figure 9. Stage 1 floor plan sketch by Archie Moore & Kevin O’Brien, Image: courtesy of Samstag

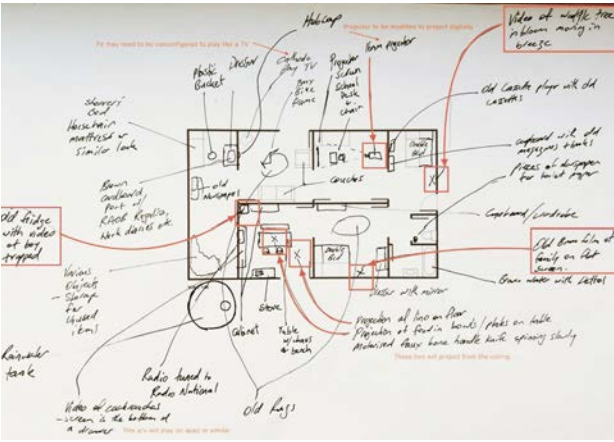


Figure 10. Stage 2 working floor plan drawn by Jaquie Hagan, annotated by Archie Moore and Molly Reynolds
Image: courtesy of Samstag

In preparation for Moore’s exhibition I had researched his work while engaging with the Samstag team and Moore’s representatives about the floor plan for the house yet to be constructed. It was serendipitous that I came into the exhibition process at this time where I could directly apply my interior architecture skills in interpreting and developing the floor plan while absorbing and engaging in curatorial practice. Moore had sketched out a loose floorplan (Figure 9) with friend, collaborator and architect Kevin O’Brien whom he had worked with on *kith & kin* for the Venice Biennale. Over the course of the next two months and following many consultations and amendments (Figure 10) the floor plan went through a number of iterations before arriving at a final version ready for construction¹ (Figure 11).

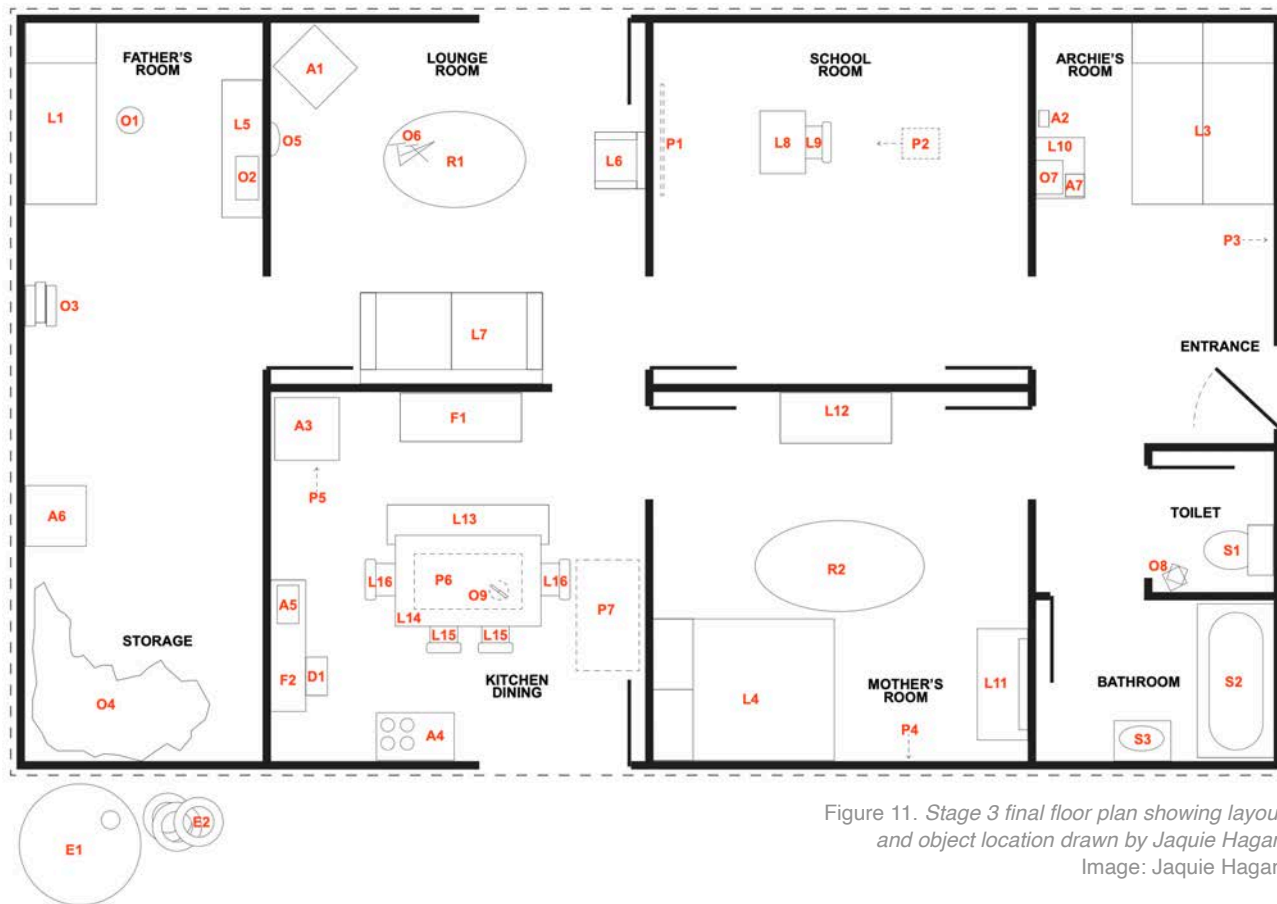


Figure 11. Stage 3 final floor plan showing layout and object location drawn by Jaquie Hagan
Image: Jaquie Hagan

The team of highly professional and talented individuals that made this exhibition happen did not go unnoticed. The collaboration, coordination and collective will of all involved to get this exhibition over the line is paramount to its success. In addition to O'Brien, the other members of Moore's team were filmmaker and director Molly Reynolds, production designer and arts advisor Dahlia Opala, and of course the highly accomplished Samstag team² led by director Erica Green and head curator Gillian Brown.

Initiating work with Moore on this exhibition years prior, Reynolds an experienced documentarian known for her 2021 film *My Name is Gulpilil* amongst other renowned works *Twelve Canoes* and *Another Country* (collaborations with partner Rolf De Heer of *Bad Boy Bubby* fame) was essential in interpreting and facilitating Moore's vision in this 5th iteration of *Dwelling*. Reynolds' directorial experience was key in producing the extensive collection of moving image installations that went into the *Adelaide Issue*.

In the month leading up to install, there were regular deliveries of furniture and domestic pieces to the gallery loading dock — soon populating the store room which now resembled a reclamation yard or second hand auction house. Opala's keen eye and tenacity was integral to creating the domesticity of the spaces as she sourced many of the second hand pieces that were not from Moore's own collection — hoarding them in her carport for months leading up to the exhibition install and providing a regular flow of dimensions so I could ensure items worked spatially within the plan.

The majority of the smaller objects and artefacts used in the *Adelaide Issue* were Moore's own private collection, keepsakes from his childhood and previous iterations of *Dwelling* (Figure 12). Not all of the objects from Moore's collection are used in every iteration. Moore is very much an intuitive artist and observing him work within the gallery space it was clear that *Dwelling* was an ongoing evolution of what has come before.

² Samstag team: associate curator Anna Zagala, administrator Eleanor Amor, public programs coordinator Sarah Buckley, curatorial assistant Emily Clinton, builder Klaus Frohlich, and installers; Peter Carroll, Pantelis Georgiadis, Olivia Kathigitis, Jennifer Mathews, Nat Penney

There were no hard and fast determinations (with the exception of the physical limitations of a house within the gallery). Moore's fluidity in assessing and adjusting in response to the current circumstance showcased his sensitivity to place — remaining open to artistic opportunities that would present themselves.

Throughout the planning stage, the intersection between creating a piece of interactive sculptural art and the tangible realities of building a full scale house within a publicly attended gallery were on occasion at odds with each other. As an artwork, the spaces within were fashioned to be at a domestic scale and Moore's intent was to create an immersive experience, to evoke an emotive response from the audience as they moved through the small restricted spaces and doorways.

“I want it to be immersive and overwhelming — interweaving the personal history with the national history of Australia.”

— Archie Moore
(On Art 2022)

The reality though, was as a built form it had to be safe and accessible and still meet national standards and building code. To accomodate both the artist's intent and the legalities of the gallery as a public space, a compromise was met. What would have usually been the standard domestic door width of 820mm was widened to 920mm to accommodate accessibility requirements and two additional 1500mm wide egress openings added to both sides of the building. Following these amendments, the site facilities manager was content to sign off on the plans prior to construction.

There were some implications to these decisions. Domestic doors that had been salvaged months prior had to be widened by joining on additional strips of timber. The result is clearly visible in the finished work, but the DIY mis-matched aesthetic suited Moore's vision and the unpainted add-ons were left on show as is. Originally the doors were intended to be left in the open position to assist flow and access into each room. As such the smaller door size would not have been noticeable. However during the install Moore invoked his artist's prerogative and chose to have all the doors fitted with saloon swing hinges, thus keeping the doors closed to provide the audience with a feeling of uncertainty as they ventured through these transitory portals. Creating anticipatory tension while obtaining direct sensory feedback in navigating the physical resistance and trajectory of the doors (Figure 13).



Figure 12. Molly Reynolds and Archie Moore enjoying the collection during install, *Dwelling* (Adelaide Issue)
Image: Jaquie Hagan

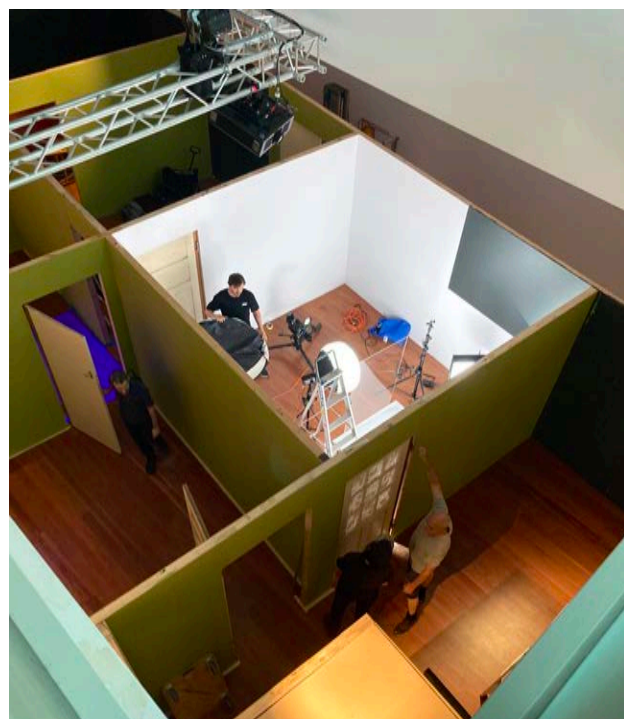


Figure 13. View from above during install - showing the set preparation for the filming of the boy in the fridge scene and on the other side of the door, Moore and builder Klaus discussing the door swings, Image: Jaquie Hagan



Figure 14. View from above during install - showing the audio visual rigging being prepared prior to hoisting up above the gallery space, Image: Jaquie Hagan

The Install consisted of three phases which were equally important but each generated their own distinct momentum and intensity. The first being the set up of the overhead rigging for housing the moving image projectors and lighting. This was no small task and the technicians from Mosaic Audio Visual were consummate professionals in handling such an enormous yet delicate exercise. Each install phase overlapped and often were non-sequential, with the audio visual elements further refined throughout the install (Figure 14, 15, 16).

The second was the construction phase. This consisted of demarcating the size and location of the house with tape on the gallery floor as specified in the plans. It was at this stage that Moore decided to add an additional interior door between the kitchen and living room to improve the flow. Satisfied with the location and feel of the rooms, construction could begin. Once the framework for the walls started materialising the pace accelerated rapidly and in just over a week the basic form of the house could be experienced.

While construction was taking place, painting of the gallery walls was also underway followed by the painting of the internal house walls. The olive green colour used on the internals is a reoccurring colour which featured heavily in Moore's *Dwelling 2* and *Dwelling 4* works.

The final and perhaps most anticipated phase was the set dressing and the wrapping of the house in a printed fabric depicting the weather board materiality of Moore's old cottage (Figure 17). There was an industrious hum of activity during this period which saw Moore implement his vision for the *Adelaide Issue* bringing together all of the elements and team in the final push to deliver this ambitious exhibition.

Unique to the *Adelaide Issue* which is site specific to the Samstag gallery, is the perspective from the upper level void looking down through the gallery offering a "dollhouse" like engagement with *Dwelling* (Figure 1). This aspect also proved useful during the install allowing communication through the space and offering an overview as the install progressed.



Figure 15. Reynolds discussing the lino projection with Seb from Mosaic, Image: Jaquie Hagan



Figure 16. Configuring the kitchen table projections to align with the setting, Image: Jaquie Hagan



Figure 17. Fabric wrapped exterior, front entrance, *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)*
Image: Sia Duff, courtesy Samstag Museum of Art

The final touches were added to each room ensuring the scene was set in what could now be interpreted as individual film sets (Figure 20). As Moore made some last minute doodles on furniture (Figure 18 & 19) and the team placed objects, repositioned them and assessed how they were relating to each other — eventually the objects settled in their place ready to share a story, trigger a memory or promote inquiry. A collective sigh was had.

This is an intensive and immersive exhibition with many moving parts (literally). As such it requires a measure of daily maintenance tasks to ensure Moore's vision can be sustained throughout the entirety of its exhibition season. At the end of each day, being an interactive exhibition, a walkthrough will determine what elements need to be repositioned, refolded or reordered and ensure any enthusiastic audience members are not still residing in the house. Batteries and power packs that run the tape player in Moore's room and moving installations in the kitchen need to be recharged. In the morning, Dettol needs to be added back into the bath water to maintain the olfactory element.

To help inform gallery attendants I compiled a collection of research and background reading on Moore, his previous *Dwelling* iterations and his recent Biennale work *kith & kin* to assist in cultural mediation practice with audiences.



Figure 18. Moore's living room couch artwork additions
Image: Jaquie Hagan

As *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)* draws to a close, my thoughts turn to the impermanence of this body of work. Despite being expressed in such robust form this exhibition will be deconstructed, deinstalled, deactivated. The work itself will be recast as memory, subject to the very fallibility Moore's practice endeavours to expose. *Dwelling's* double meaning of both place and past will continue to resonate with audiences beyond its physical manifestation.

"It's just kind of a more cathartic purging process and that's what the double meaning of dwelling is."

— Archie Moore
(On Art 2022)

My time at Samstag working on *Dwelling* has delivered a rich assortment of shared experiences which will influence and shape my engagement with future exhibitions and artists. I consider Moore the cognoscenti of shared experiences and his quiet advocacy for reconciliation offers others the generous opportunity to step into his shoes.



Figure 19. Close up of of skull drawing, biro pen on vinyl upholstery
Image: Jaquie Hagan



Figure 20. Finished lounge room set, *Dwelling (Adelaide Issue)*
Image: Sia Duff, courtesy Samstag Museum of Art

I thought it only fitting towards the end of Moore's time at Samstag to suggest a uniquely "Adelaidean" experience for him to share in before heading back to Queensland. In the spirit of stepping into ones shoes, I shared with him my experience of growing up in the Northern suburbs of Adelaide and my memory of riding the O'bahn busway³ to and from town regularly as a teenager. With Adelaide hosting the only O'bahn in Australia this is an everyday commuter experience he will not encounter on any other public transport system in the country. If Moore was looking to immerse himself in the Adelaide suburban experience then hopping a ride on the O'bahn out to Tea Tree Plaza was the ticket.

Moore is an authentic individual of substance who personifies his practice — he did indeed embrace the O'bahn experience!

Dwelling (Adelaide Issue) exhibited from 11 October until 6 November 2024 at Samstag Museum of Art.

³ The O'bahn is a guided busway where the bus runs on a specially constructed concrete track, a hybrid of bus and rail, only servicing the Northern suburbs of Adelaide

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Benin Bronzes Collection.

By Maeve McNeilage

This article is an abbreviated version of a Significance Assessment the author wrote to the standards of Significance 2.0. This report was authored as a student assessment for the Museum and Curatorial Studies program at the University of Adelaide and was not written for or on behalf of the South Australian Museum. The contents reflect the research and opinions of the author, and are not in any way affiliated with the South Australian Museum. This report is dated as of October 2024 and is therefore not indicative of any subsequent changes or updated stances of any of the organisations mentioned.



The collection of 4 *Emwin Arre* (Edo term for Benin bronzes, ivories, beads, and other artefacts) at the South Australian Museum (SAM) is well-provenanced to the looting of the Kingdom of Benin during the British Punitive Expedition of 1897. These objects have, as a result of this historic event, been majorly decontextualised, and therefore there is limited information specific to these objects prior to the expedition. Most information available about the objects is broadly specific to their object type, their cultural use, and their spiritual significance. Each object is in good to excellent condition, and they are all highly representative samples of their object type. Three of the objects are made using metal casting techniques characteristic of the Kingdom of Benin, and one is a carved ivory which is likewise demonstrative of the artistic styles of Benin. Due to the nature of their creation, each object is technically one of a kind, though stylistically they are not rare and are similar to many other *Emwin Arre*.

“...an event which ended the independence of the Kingdom of Benin...”

The collection is of major historical significance as it is directly associated with the Punitive Expedition, an event which ended the independence of the Kingdom of Benin, and which speaks broadly to the British colonisation of Africa. The collection at SAM has enhanced interpretive capacity as the *Emwin Arre*’s presence in Australia, a country over 14,000km away from Benin City, within 2-years of their theft during a time where travel and communication were slow, is demonstrative of the immensity of the British Empire and symbolic of British imperial power.

The *Emwin Arre* are socially significant as there is a continued spiritual connection to the Edo people who still practice the beliefs for which these objects were originally created. The Edo people have actively called for the return of *Emwin Arre* scattered around the world for decades and have demonstrated that these objects remain culturally significant. This is a connection to these objects which there is no evidence of having manifested in the Nigerian community of South Australia. Additionally, these objects have enhanced interpretive capacity as they have since become synonymous with the repatriation and restitution discourse in the museum sector.

Finally, the objects are of artistic significance as they are representative of the distinct artistic style of Benin and demonstrative of the mastery of lost-wax metallurgic techniques used by the Benin artisan guilds. Their artistic significance is enhanced by their high degree of representativeness and good condition.

Three of the *Emwin Arre* were acquired at the same time by SAM; the altar tusk (A73539), the ceremonial head (A6523), and the Bird of Prophecy staff (A41813) (Figure 2). These objects were included on a price list of items sent to SAM by William Downing Webster (South Australian Museum Archive Collections 1898). Webster was a collector and dealer of objects in the 1890s who, between 1898 and 1901, became one of the principal sellers of objects looted from Benin (Digital Benin 2021). Many of the objects Webster procured directly from members of the British Punitive Expedition on Benin in 1897 (Digital Benin 2021), and in a letter from Webster to Edward Charles Stirling (the Director of the South Australian Museum from 1884 to 1912) Webster states that he “purchased most of the Benin specimens, primarily from Officers in the Expedition” (Digital Benin 2021). The objects were acquired by the museum through a donation by David A. Murray, an Adelaide-based merchant and politician, who made an offer of 50 pounds to Webster for these objects (along with a selection of other items) then donated them to SAM in 1898 (South Australian Museum 1898).

Figure 1 previous page. Benin Bronzes on display at SAM
Image: Maeve McNeilage



Figure 2. Left to right: Ceremonial Head - cast bronze, Bird of Prophecy Staff - cast bronze, Altar Tusk - carved elephant tusk
Images: courtesy South Australian Museum, source Digital Benin. A6523, A41813, A73539.

The fourth object, the relief plaque (A41812) (Figure 3), was procured around 1901 through a donation by Sir William Ingram. Ingram, a British politician and journalist, was married to Stirling's sister. Stirling visited Ingram in England in 1899 and was given a collection of ethnographic material which included the relief plaque (South Australian Museum 1902). It is unknown exactly how Ingram procured the plaque; however, it is known from the provenance of the Commemorative Head of the Queen Mother at the British Museum (Af1897,1011.1), which was also donated by Ingram, that Ingram purchased that object, along with others from Benin, at a Stevens auction on the 24th of August 1897 (British Museum 2022). The auction was of the private collection of Sir Arthur Vyell Vyvyan, who served on the Benin Punitive Expedition (British Museum 2022), and therefore it is a possibility that Ingram purchased the relief plaque at SAM from the same auction.

Prior to their looting in 1897, each of the *Emwin Arre* objects belonged to the *Oba* (the King) at the time, *Oba* Ovonramwen N'Ogbaisi (Figure 4). Ovonramwen was the thirty-fifth *Oba* of the Kingdom of Benin (Figure 5) and reigned from 1888 – 1897 (British Museum 2024). These objects would have been passed down to him through the royal family line of succession according to the Benin native law and custom of *Igiogbe* (Sogbesan & Laotan-Brown 2022, p. 33).

Historical context

The Artistic Traditions of the Kingdom of Benin:

The Kingdom of Benin resided in what is the present-day Edo State of southwestern Nigeria. Benin City was the capital of the kingdom, from which the *Oba* resided and ruled over the local Edo people (Plankensteiner 2007, p. 76). The Edo have rich artisan traditions which were integral to the spiritual, social, and economic function of their society. Artisan guilds were organisations which controlled the production of royal creations for festivals and cultural events, and included the bronze casters' guild (*IgunEromwon*) and the ivory and wood carvers' guild (*Igbesanmwon*) (Sogbesan & Laotan-Brown 2022, p. 32). All of the guilds were controlled by the *Oba*, and the *IgunEromwon* was the most popular guild in Benin, with relief plaques and ceremonial busts of *Obas* being the most well-known objects they created (Plankensteiner 2007, p. 77). The metalwork techniques used by the *IgunEromwon* date back a thousand years, with the lost-wax casting method being one of the earliest known metallurgic techniques (South Australian Museum 1994). The artworks produced by the guilds were used in rituals and performances linked to the *Oba*, who was "spiritually responsible for the welfare of his subordinates" (Plankensteiner 2007, p. 84), and whose palace was "not only the secular, but also the spiritual centre of Edo society" (Plankensteiner 2007, p. 84).



Figure 3. Relief Plaque - cast bronze
Image: courtesy South Australian Museum, source Digital Benin. A41812.



Figure 4. Photograph of Oba Ovonramwen, King of Benin
Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence. Af,A47.70.

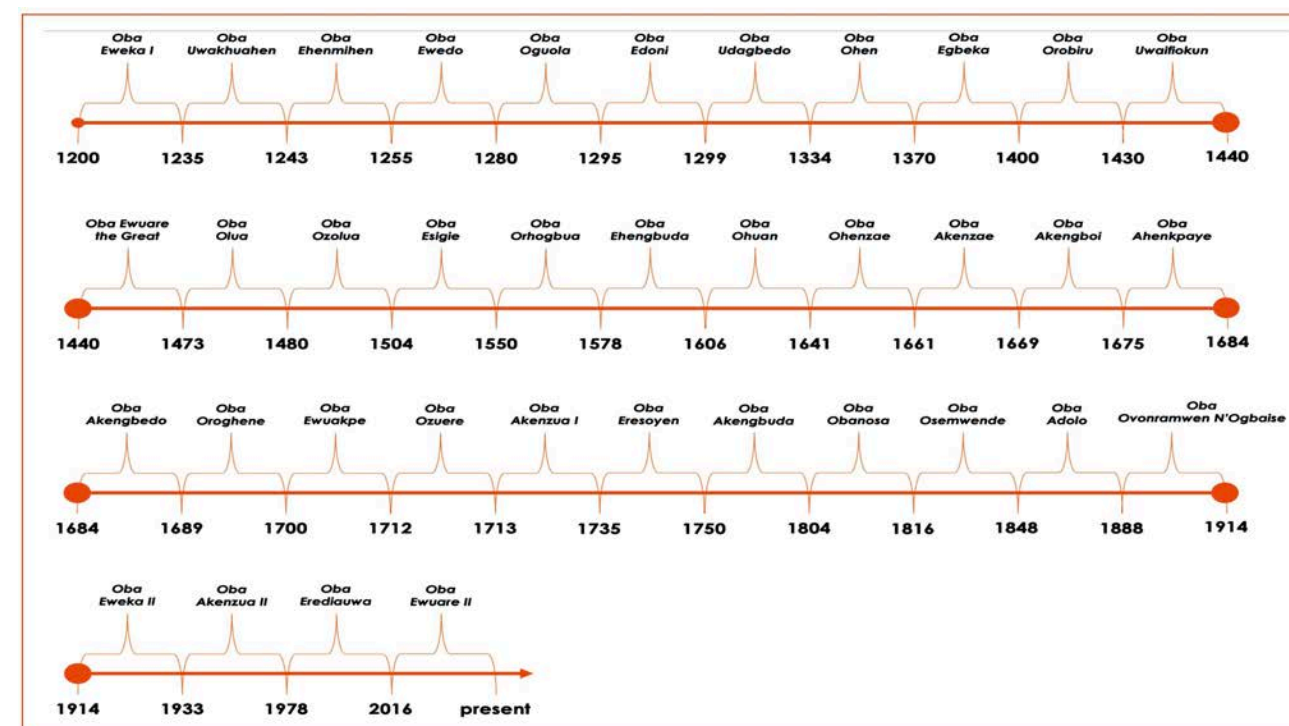


Figure 5. Timeline of Obas
Image: Maeve McNeilage

The purpose of the relief plaques was to portray the history of the Benin kingdom and the power of the *Obas*, and the bronze heads were commissioned by *Obas* for the ancestral altars of their predecessors (Plankensteiner 2007, p. 83). Ivory tusks were crafted with figurative carvings depicting the reign of a deceased *Oba*, and were a tradition introduced in the late eighteenth century (Plankensteiner 2007, p. 78). Objects like the Bird of Prophecy ceremonial staff were used during the annual *Ugie Oro* festival, where chiefs struck the beak of the bird in honour of Benin's victory over the Attah of Idah in 1515 and celebrated the ongoing power of the *Oba* (Digital Benin 2021). These artworks and ceremonial objects belonged to the *Oba*, and adorned the different palaces and shrines of the royal family as both decorations, displays of wealth, ceremonial objects, and records of the history of Benin (Jones 2021).

The British and Benin:

The Kingdom of Benin was wealthy from the trade of pepper, ivory, cotton textiles, beads, redwood, rubber, palm oil, metal goods, and the transatlantic slave trade (Plankensteiner 2007, p. 77). Trade with Europeans began with the Portuguese in the late 1400s, and eventually expanded to the Dutch, French, and British (Harman 2014, p. 16). By the late nineteenth century, the British dominated the Niger coast, and had become dissatisfied by the trading conditions dictated by the *Oba* (Harman 2014, p. 24). They sought to place Benin under increasing pressure, bringing the bordering regions under their administration as protectorates, both willingly and by force (Plankensteiner 2007, p. 77). British official Henry Galway eventually had *Oba* Ovonramwen sign a trade agreement in 1892, which demanded exclusive British control of all property and people in Benin in exchange for "the British Empire's gracious favour and protection" (Harman 2014, p. 24). Ovonramwen's awareness of the consequences of that signature are contested (Plankensteiner 2007, p. 77), and he did not uphold the conditions of this unfavourable trade agreement, much to the frustration of the British.

"...more than 1,200 British soldiers occupied the city and looted the palaces and monuments..."

By the 4th of January 1897 a group of British officials travelled to Benin to enforce the agreement (Philips 2021, p. 59). They did not heed the warning that there was a festival happening in Benin city which forbade foreigners entering, and a conflict broke out which resulted in the deaths of 6 British soldiers and over 200 African carriers (Harman 2014, p. 24). The two surviving British officials sent word of the conflict back to England, and the British quickly retaliated by launching an invasion which came to be known as the Punitive Expedition of 1897 (Harman 2014, p. 25). On the 9th of February 1897, more than 1,200 British soldiers occupied the city and looted the palaces and monuments (Philips 2021, p. 61), taking at least 2,500 pieces of Benin's artwork and cultural material (Figure 6) (Harman 2014, p. 25). The theft and sale of these items was considered a means of offsetting the cost of the expedition, and the objects quickly circulated into museum and private collections globally (Figure 7) (Harman 2014, p. 25). Benin city was burnt down, and *Oba* Ovonramwen was exiled to Calabar where he remained until his death in 1914 (Sogbesan & Laotan-Brown 2022, p. 34). Benin came under British control and no longer was an independent kingdom (Harman 2014, p. 25).

The Aftermath of the 1897 Punitive Expedition:

Following the raid of the city, the rich art tradition in Benin went through a period of lapse. In 1914, following his father's death, the British instated Eweka II as the *Oba*, though this was purely symbolic and he had no true authority (Philips 2021, p. 164). *Oba* Eweka II encouraged the re-establishment of the guilds, and under his reign there was a revival of Benin's rich art culture, with bronze casters replicating looted objects as replacements for the royal ancestral shrines (Sogbesan & Laotan-Brown 2022, p. 33). *Oba* Akenzua II, Eweka II's son, initiated the first claims for the restitution of Benin's objects in 1936, and they have increased ever since with varying success (Hicks 2020, p. 196).



Figure 6. Photograph of Benin Expedition, 1897
Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence. Af,A79.13.

Contemporary context

The 'Poster-Child' for Repatriation:

The struggle for the return of the *Emwin Arre* has become synonymous with the broader issue of repatriating stolen objects in museum collections (Stahn 2022, p. 50). The objects have a comparatively straightforward story of plunder than the opaque circumstances in which a majority of museum colonial era collections were obtained (Philips 2022, p. 1). With the influx in attention to calls for restitution, many *Emwin Arre* have been repatriated to Nigeria from major institutions like the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge and the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington DC (Stahn 2022, p. 52). The British Museum, which has the largest collection of *Emwin Arre*, has been the most criticised for not repatriating its almost 1,000 objects (Philips 2022, p. 3).



Figure 7. Photograph of three Benin bronzes in museum album
Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence. Af,A154.42.

The Local Nigerian Politics of Repatriation:

Repatriating *Emwin Arre* to Nigeria is not as straightforward as deciding whether or not to return the objects. The government museum storage facilities in Lagos and Benin City are at capacity, so Nigeria is only in a position to assume legal title when physical capacity is addressed (Philips 2022, p. 2). Additionally, even if the decision has been made to return the objects, there are hurdles around who exactly they will be returned to. The current *Oba*, Ewuare II, is the great-great grandson of *Oba* Ovonramwen and therefore has unparalleled moral authority over the *Emwin Arre* (Philips 2022, p. 2). Ewuare II wants the objects returned to a new Royal Museum close to his palace, but the Museum of West African Art (MOWAA), endorsed by the Edo State governor Godwin Obaseki, has attracted international support and made more progress towards its creation (Philips 2022, p. 2).

Obaseki and Ewuare II have a difficult relationship, and Ewuare II's opposition to MOWAA undermines its legitimacy (Philips 2022, p. 2) and therefore complicates institutions' decisions on who it is best to return the *Emwin Arre* to.

The Position of the South Australian Museum:

SAM's *Emwin Arre* come under the West African Cultures collection. The museum has the largest and most comprehensive Australian Aboriginal cultural material collection in the world (South Australian Museum 2024), and staff at SAM explained that this collection is subsequently a priority over the West African Cultures collection for the museum in the face of limited display space and insufficient funding. Currently three of the four objects are displayed in an unmarked corner of the Aboriginal Cultures Gallery on Level 1 in an old cabinet (Figure 1 & 8).

The board of SAM previously considered deaccessioning the Benin objects from their collection in 1983, but in a report by Graeme Pretty to the Museum Board on the 22nd of August 1983 it was ultimately recommended the objects remain in the collection (Figure 9).

Presently the objects have been promised to be returned by the Director of SAM, Dr David Gaimster, though the specifics of this have not been made public. For now, the objects are registered on Digital Benin. Vested interest in the objects from the local South Australian and broader Australian Nigerian community has been enquired into, but with no response. Additionally, from consultation with staff, there is no relationship between SAM and local community groups in regards to these objects.



Figure 8. Benin Bronzes solitary display cabinet, discreetly placed in an inconspicuous location at SAM
Image: Maeve McNeillage

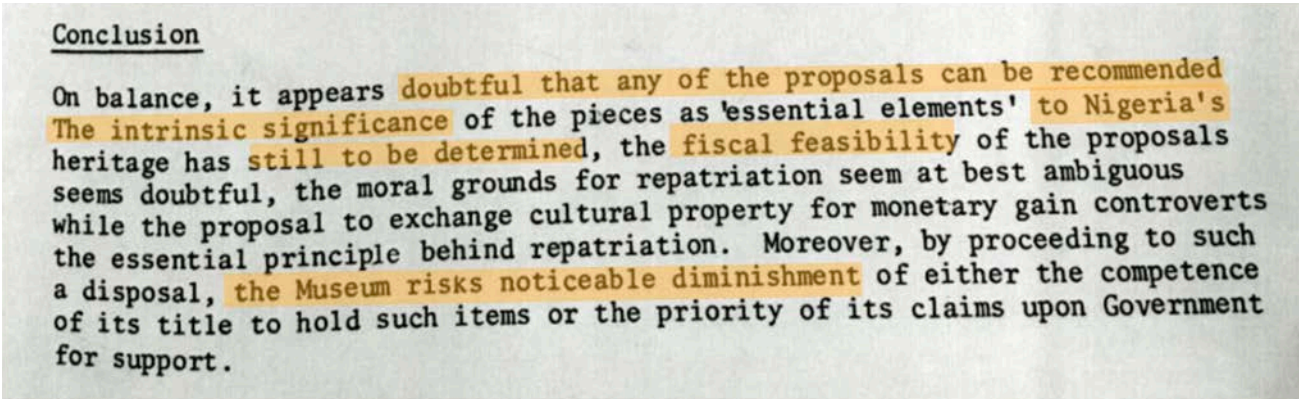


Figure 9. Conclusion from Graeme Pretty's report on deaccessioning Benin Bronzes, 1983
Image: Maeve McNeillage

Historical significance

Provenance to the Punitive Expedition of 1897:

The SAM collection is historically significant due to its provenance to the Punitive Expedition. The objects are identified as having been looted by British soldiers during the expedition, and then sold to William Webster and William Ingram, two key figures in the reselling and distribution of *Emwin Arre* internationally. The Punitive Expedition is a major historical event for the Edo people as most of the physical embodiments of their cultural heritage were stolen, their ancient city was destroyed, many lives were lost, and their kingdom's long line of independence was severed. The culture of these people was permanently marked by this event, with the *Oba* being stripped of his powers and exiled, many of the kingdom's customs and rituals being banned, the ancient artistic practices going through an extended period of recession, and the Kingdom's almost 1,000 years of independence coming to an end. This event is also significant in the broader history of the European 'Scramble for Africa' and the forming of what is now Nigeria.

“In a South Australian context, these objects and their return have a symbolic value regarding the future of SAM...”

The Power of the British Empire:

The story of what happened to Benin is indicative of the brand of exploitation particular to the British colonisation of the African continent. It differed from what was done in settler colonial states like Australia, as it was a particularly extractive, militarist and corporate style of colonialism (Hicks 2020, p. 232). The objects in SAM's collection have a direct tie to that history and are therefore useful conduits of truth telling. The fact that most of the objects in the collection arrived in Adelaide, approximately 14,000 km away from Benin City, within 2-years of their theft (Figure 10) and during a time where travel and communication were slow, is demonstrative of the immensity of the British Empire and symbolic of their imperial power.

History of African Art:

Emwin Arre are historically significant as it was the mass circulation of these objects that first introduced Westerners at scale to the artistry and craftsmanship of the African nations which they considered 'primitive' (Sogbesan & Laotan-Brown 2022, p. 37). As such, these objects are emblematic of the history of how African art came to the rest of the world.

Social significance

Spiritual Connection to Present-Day Edo People:

The objects have social significance as they have a continued connection to the Edo people who still practice the spiritual beliefs for which these objects were originally created (Plankensteiner 2007, p. 87). The Edo diaspora have actively advocated for the return of these objects for decades, and their cultural connection remains very much alive in the public consciousness (Philips 2022, p. 2). This is a connection to these objects which, as previously mentioned, there is no evidence of having manifested in the Nigerian community of South Australia.

The 'Poster-Child' for Repatriation:

Emwin Arre are synonymous with repatriation discourse, and the case of their return spearheads this movement as it is considered a more 'open and shut' case to argue due to the overt and clearly documented injustices. In a South Australian context, these objects and their return have a symbolic value regarding the future of SAM, which has struggled to reform its galleries and address its colonial past. Despite this, SAM is an institution that is supportive of repatriation and collaboration with Australian First Nations peoples, and prioritises its Aboriginal cultural heritage collection in its mission. However, this is a progressive sentiment that does not extend to the indigenous Edo people, with SAM failing to make an explicit commitment to the return of this collection. This symbolic status of the *Emwin Arre* therefore gives these objects another dimension of interpretive capacity and subsequently enriches their significance.

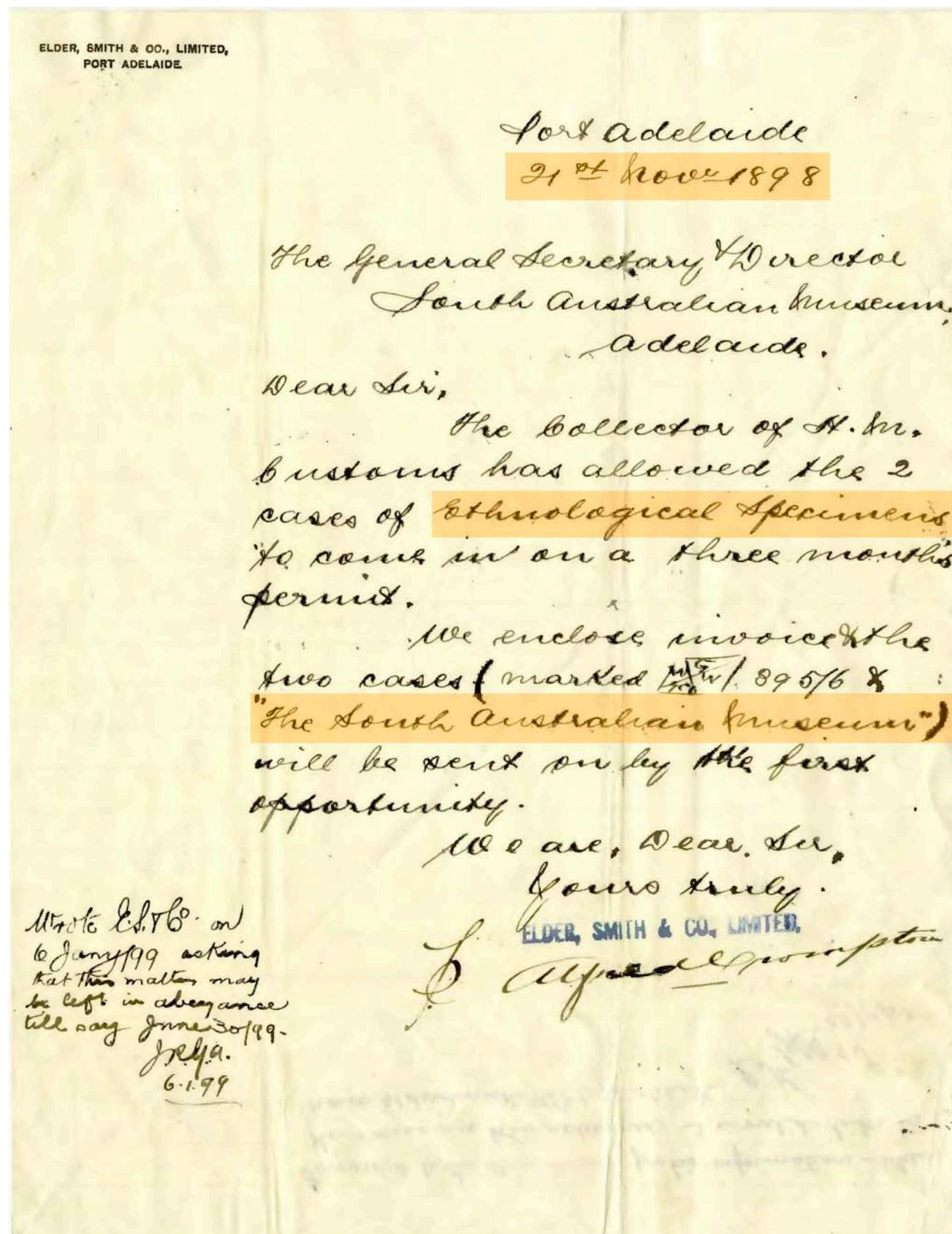


Figure 10. Correspondence from Elder, Dempster & Co. to SAM announcing the arrival to Australia of 'ethnological specimens', which included cultural objects from the Kingdom of Benin, 1898. Image: courtesy South Australian Museum, source Digital Benin. AA309/1/1/199

Artistic significance

Artistic mastery:

The *Emwin Arre* at SAM have artistic significance as they are all in good condition and are representative of the skilled craftsmanship and intricate use of lost-wax casting and ivory carving. By the nature of how these objects are created, they are each an original item, though there are many that are similar in construction and design. They are visually striking and distinctive in their style, and depict subjects and events of importance to the Edo people.

As demonstrated, the South Australian Museum's collection of *Emwin Arre* have high historical, social, and artistic significance, particularly to the Edo people living in Nigeria. As highly significant objects, whose return has been actively requested by the descendants of those from whom they were originally stolen, it is recommended that direct action is taken to repatriate this collection. However, since there is some contestation as to the most appropriate avenues for repatriation, it is first recommended that there is consultation with official representatives of MOWAA and the current *Oba*, Ewuare II. It is also recommended that when engaging with the relevant experts, the following options are considered:

1. The objects are legally and physically returned to Nigeria and placed in the care of whichever official body is deemed most appropriate.
2. The objects are legally returned to whomever is deemed most appropriate, but remain at SAM as part of a new and improved display which educates visitors on their history and enables the objects to act as cultural emissaries for Nigeria.
3. The objects are legally returned to whomever is deemed most appropriate, but are loaned to AGSA which is better resourced at this time to exhibit these objects so they may educate visitors on their history and act as cultural emissaries for Nigeria.

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Porcelain

Beyond
Functionality
and
Expanding
into
Contemporary
Art

By Wee Shiang TAY

How do contemporary artists use porcelain in their creative practice? Discussing continuities, changes, and innovations concerning materials, functions, and meanings in the work of Johnson Tsang, Yeesoookyung, and Zemer Peled.

Porcelain: Beyond Functionality and Expanding into Contemporary Art focuses on the works of three contemporary artists: Johnson Tsang, Yeesoookyung and Zemer Peled. These artists not only come from different cultural backgrounds and personal experiences; each of them utilises different methods when it comes to working with porcelain in their artistic practices. This essay delves into the history of porcelain and how its beauty and aesthetics have popularised ceramic wares during international imports to Europe and other parts of Asia. Furthermore, the use of porcelain had been carried on during the 20th century when modern art was on the rise. This led to the formation of Japanese ceramics group *Sodeisha* by Kazuo Yagi, *The American Clay Revolution* founded by Peter Voulkos, as well as the use of communist propaganda in the 19th century during the revolution of Russian porcelain manufacturing.

The History of Porcelain

The earliest porcelain appeared in China during the Shang Dynasty (1600 - 1050 BCE), but the iconic cobalt blue and milky white porcelain started during late Tang Dynasty (618 - 906 CE) when the techniques of creating porcelain wares had matured. This ceramic practice expanded and grew throughout the years during the Song (960 - 1279 CE), Yuan (1279 - 1368 CE), and Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644 CE). Appreciation for ceramics rose among the Chinese aristocrats when the trend for tea-drinking became popular during the Tang Dynasty. A poet named Lu Yu, wrote a famous manual on tea, *Chajing (The Classic of Tea)* to elevate the act of drinking tea, thus transforming it into a ceremonious practice. Therefore, the wares used to make tea were upgraded.

Tea bowls, tea bowl stands, ewers, sugar and salt containers, mortars, plates and incense burners that were made from various materials could potentially be all made from ceramic as well (Krahl 2010). Jingdezhen, one of the earliest and largest porcelain industry cities to this day, have been producing high quality porcelain wares for over 600 years (Dillion 1976). Other ceramic centres similar to Jingdezhen have not only produced ordinary wares for farmers, but also porcelain wares for the royal courts, which have been exported to Europe and Central Asia via the Maritime Silk Road since the ninth century. This led to the critical growth and development of Chinese white porcelain overseas and in China (Zong et al. 2022).

“...porcelain became a luxury item in Europe during the sixteenth century.”

Due to the material's perceived exotic, foreign nature and quality, porcelain became a luxury item in Europe during the sixteenth century. Commerce between Europe and Asia had also increased to meet the demands of blue and white wares. This led to the customisation of porcelain wares to fit the Western market, while its utilitarian purposes drove Europe to manufacture their own type of porcelain in order to create wares similar to the imports from China. Additionally, the prestige and exoticness from Chinese and Japanese influences provided strong motivation to discover the processes behind the elegant white wares (Munger and Sullivan 2018).

According to Kristensen, there have been archaeological finds of Chinese porcelain in Copenhagen that were connected to the Royal House, as well as Ole Worm, a Danish physician and historian. There were also many traces of Kraak porcelain wares, which were particularly common and mass produced in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century. Kraak porcelain was mostly found in wealthier districts, which implies these wares were purchased by affluent individuals in Copenhagen (Kristensen 2014).

Figure 1 previous page. Johnson Tsang, *Lucid Dream II - Comfort Zone*, 2019, porcelain, 31 x 20 x 16 inches
Image: courtesy of the artist

Porcelain in the contemporary art world

When the modern art movement began during the mid-nineteenth century, potters all around the world began to shift and expand their focus over the use of clay and porcelain. Modern Chinese pottery during the 1980s were influenced aesthetically by the concepts of Western pottery. Potters from Jingdezhen slowly began emphasising painting techniques rather than the technical making of wares, transforming porcelain into a decorative form of painting (Qi and Yuan 2022). During the twentieth century, Avant Garde ceramic groups such as the *Sodeisha* from Japan and *The American Clay Revolution* from the US, have been formed. Simultaneously, the Soviet Union decided to revolutionise the purpose of porcelain by using it as communist propaganda during the Russian Revolution (Crichton-Miller 2017).

Sodeisha, also known as *Crawling Through Mud Association*, was founded in 1948 by Kazuo Yagi (1918 - 1979), along with Osamu Suzuki (1926 - 2001) and Hikaru Yamada (1924 - 2001). The group has immense significance as it established a contemporary aesthetic in Japanese ceramics after the exposure to western art and the Second World War. The ceramics they made had sculptural properties, and themes of self-expression. Thus, these ceramic pieces were known as *objet-yaki*, non-functional ceramic sculptures (Matsuo 2014). Although the *Sodeisha* were based in Kyoto, many of the members developed their artistic practice by learning about international modern art concepts from artists such as Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp, whilst incorporating their knowledge of traditional ceramics from China, Korea, and Japan.

The American Clay Revolution, also known as the *California Clay Movement and Craft-to-Art movement*, was a school for ceramics that started in California in the 1950s. The driving force behind the ceramic's scene was Peter Voulkos, a prominent ceramic artist during the twentieth century, and founder of the ceramics programs at Otis College of Art and Design in 1954 and University of California in 1958. Many of Voulkos's sculptures at the time were revolutionary as they broke the constraints of utilitarian ceramics and bridged the gap between fine arts and crafts (Google Arts & Culture 2017). His presence had motivated many ceramic artists to experiment with materials and express their own individual styles and story.

“This led him [Lenin] to question the possibility of adorning communist propaganda onto wares...”

The revolution of Russian ceramics started when the State Porcelain Factory (previously known as the Imperial Porcelain Factory) in St Petersburg was almost closed due to the Bolshevik Revolution. Prior to the Russian Social Democratic Party seizing power in 1917, the making of porcelain was only reserved for the Imperial army and military hospitals. Without a market for porcelain and the lack of factory staff and funds, the decorative painting and sculpture department was shut down. During this time, however, Vladimir Lenin, a Russian politician, saw many undecorated plates lying within the Factory. This led him to question the possibility of adorning communist propaganda onto wares and sculptures, creating a political and contemporary aesthetic to fit the people of a Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (Crichton-Miller 2017). With this, Piotr Vaulin, former director of the Abramtsevo Ceramic Studio in Moscow, and Sergei Chekhonin, a successful graphic designer were appointed as the Factory's artistic directors.

Chekhonin would not only create designs that were influenced by Neo-classicism and Cubism, but also utilise his connections in recruiting established and talented artists into the industry. Wassily Kandinsky, a renowned Russian abstract painter, also contributed his designs to the factory. In 1922, the Suprematism movement, led by Kazimir Malevich, took over the art scene. At the Factory, Malevich explored his Supremacist idea of an art of “pure feeling” through the designs of coloured geometric forms. It is interesting to note that for him, the colour white suggested the symbol of infinity and a realm of a higher feeling. This resulted in porcelain being an ideal ground for geometric designs. Despite this movement, by 1932 experimental and modern artists were viewed as enemies of the state, leading to the arrest of Malevich and Chekhonin during their attempted escape to Paris. The Factory shifted its focus to producing porcelain animal figurines and dinner wares, and was later renamed the Leningrad Lomonosov Porcelain Factory.

About Johnson Tsang

Johnson Tsang is a Hong Kong-based contemporary artist and sculptor who is well known for both his surrealist and realistic sculptures and imagery. His work often features themes of identity, culture, relationships between humans and nature, and the human condition (Figure 2). In his practice he uses a variety of ceramic techniques, such as slab building and wheel throwing to create an even thickness in order to reduce the risks of cracks, as well as altering the clay body into a sculptural form whilst it is still soft and malleable (Hayes 2023). Tsang is a self-taught artist. He started drawing when he was young and began experimenting with clay when he became unsatisfied with creating only 2D expressions.

“...he doesn't limit the ways in which he comes up with ideas. Practically, many ways work for him.”

Tsang believes that working with clay helps shape his subconscious and true self. It is interesting to note that the special connection between the artist and clay not only create works of art, but also showcases the artist's soul and thoughts (Hayes 2023). During an interview by *Photographize*, he states that he “doesn't limit the ways in which he comes up with ideas. Practically, many ways work for him.” Tsang also mentions his love for porcelain and in his current body of work *Lucid Dreams I and II*, he chooses to focus on its pure white form. His reasons for working with porcelain are personal. To him, the white colour of porcelain represents purity, innocence, calmness and inner peace, allowing him to feel closer to where he is supposed to be (Photographize n.d.). In his earlier works, Tsang often used colour as a way to express his negative emotions towards social and political issues that were happening around the world. It was only when his mother has passed away, however, that he realised he wanted his works to express his feelings differently. He wanted to find inner peace and joy within himself as he got older.

“Lucid Dreams explores the limits of human consciousness as the boundary between real life and dreams are blurred.”

Lucid Dreams I and II is an ongoing series created by Johnson Tsang in 2016, which consists of contemporary porcelain sculptures that feature dreamlike and lifelike facial expressions (Figure 1). Through this, *Lucid Dreams* explores the limits of human consciousness as the boundary between real life and dreams are blurred. The series of works were also partially based on personal experiences by the artist himself, as he suffered a stroke in 2022. This was followed by undergoing brain surgery, being in a ten-day coma and going through rehabilitation to regain movement and speech (Ebert 2023). Many of the sculptures convey a sense of anxiety and the artist's own pursuit of inner healing, recognising the need to stop his own inner war and face everything that happens with peace.



Figure 2. Johnson Tsang, *Lucid Dream II - Cross My Mind*, 2020, porcelain, fake grass and trees, 11.8 x 11.8 x 5.5 inches
Image: courtesy of the artist

About Yeessookyung

Yeessookyung is a South Korean artist best known for transforming unwanted ceramic shards into disfigured and biomorphic sculptures. Her work often emphasises the fragility and beauty of flawed and broken objects, and displays themes of identity of Korean ceramic history and culture (Massimodecarlo 2021). In her practice, Yeessookyung asks to collect shards of defective porcelain pots from renowned Korean ceramic potters such as Kwon Dae Sup and Lee Dong Shik. She then fuses the pieces together with 24 carat gold leaf and epoxy resin. Although the method is similar to a Japanese technique called *kintsugi* (the practice of mending broken ceramics using lacquer and powdered gold, silver or platinum), Yeessookyung states that it is not the same as it arises from different contexts. Yeessookyung's reasoning behind her use of gold leaf was that in the Korean language, gold means "geum" (금) which can also mean "crack". In an interview with *Art Asia Pacific*, she says that she initially wanted to create specific and symmetrical abstract shapes from her imagination, allowing it to be aesthetically pleasing. Unfortunately, it did not work out. Eventually, she realised that the shards guided her to shape their own organic forms, almost like puzzle pieces. Yeessookyung had formal art training as a painter at Seoul National University in the 1990s. She emerged as a contemporary artist experimenting with a wide range of mediums such as sculpture, drawing, videos and installation to express her personal experiences and views on Korean history (Long 2019).

It is important to note that Korean ceramics have played a large role in telling the history of East Asia. Japan – a country also well known for their crafts in ceramics – occupied Korea for 45 years. During 1592 - 1598, Japan invaded Korea twice, these invasions and the resulting conflicts are known as the Imjin Wars. At the time, Korean ceramics, especially baekja (Korean white porcelain) had received global recognition for its art and wares, while on the other hand, Japan did not have the ability to produce such high-quality ceramics. This led Japanese forces to kidnap many Korean potters and move them to the Kyushu region of Japan, leading to the start of the Japanese porcelain industry in the seventeenth century (Cartwright 2019).

The process of acquiring and assembling porcelain shards can be time consuming for Yeessookyung. Many of Yeessookyung's shard collections come from different regions of the Korean Peninsula, including North Korea. The acquired shard pieces come from various time periods, some are a hundred years old, while others can be from the 1950s - 60s, or even during the Japanese occupation. Afterwards, she cleans the pieces and organises them by colour, size, and shape. It is interesting to note that Yeessookyung does not plan ahead when it comes to the colour palette or patterns, much of it is part of an intuitive process. She quotes: "After I put one shard down, I then look for other shards that fit together. It's not a thought-out process; the works make themselves – the forms, the colours. Just like life, things happen naturally" (Long 2019). Many of her sculptures are also life sized, although there is no meaning behind the shapes and height, it allows easier accessibility for the audience to connect with the pieces at an eye level.

"...she celebrates the flawed beauty and the journey that these traditional ceramic vessels have taken..."

Translated Vase is an ongoing series of porcelain sculptures started by Yeessookyung in 2007 (Figure 3 & 4). She has collected stoneware and Joseon white porcelain shards with various glazes and oxides, such as Goryeo-style celadon (a greyish green glaze) and cobalt blue pigment that showcase the skills of Korean master potters. From Yeessookyung's perspective, she celebrates the flawed beauty and the journey that these traditional ceramic vessels have taken, whether it is due to their imperfections or the fragmented memory of Korea. The shards of Korean ceramics have been proven in her work to not be remnants of failure but instead, are filled with new beginnings. Though these ceramic wares have been pulled away from their intended purposes, at the same time they are liberated from the stress and anxiety that perfection brings (Kim 2022).



Figure 3. Yeessookyung, *Translated Vase*, 2012, porcelain shards, aluminium bars, epoxy, 24k gold leaf, 157 x 88 x 93cm
Image: Photo by Yang Ian, courtesy of the artist



Figure 4. Yeessookyung, *Translated Vase (The Moon)*, 2012, porcelain shards, epoxy, 24k gold leaf, 155 x 155 x 155cm
Image: Photo by Yang Ian, courtesy of the artist



Figure 5. Zemer Peled, *In Eden*, 2018, porcelain, various size
Image: courtesy of the artist

About Zemer Peled

Zemer Peled is an Israeli born contemporary ceramic artist currently residing in the United States. Most of her work explores themes of memory, cultural identity, and dual narratives, such as whole and broken forms, destruction and construction, elegance and aggression (Reinites 2015). Peled’s practice is also inspired by the beauty and brutality of the surrounding landscapes and nature. Her work often flows with organic forms and are adorned with bright colours. It is interesting to note that her sculptures give off the illusion of movement and bright floral patterns (Figure 5). However, when investigating the work closer, it is composed of thousands of sharp porcelain pieces; each shard protruding out the work dangerously in every direction. In an article, she says: “Sometimes, I look down and see that I am bleeding. And I like that shards can do that, they are dangerous” (Reinties 2015). Peled started drawing and sculpting when she was a child growing up in Kibbutz. It was only in her early 20s, however, that she started taking art more seriously after going to art therapy and being reintroduced to sculpting (Moore 2016).

“Process is crucial to my sculptural ideas. They are consistent with Kabbalah concepts...”

In Peled’s process of making, she does not have a specific reason as to why she works with porcelain, but states that the tactility of clay allows her to feel alive. To begin her artistic process, it starts with shard making (Moore 2016). Unlike Yeesoookyung who collects shards from various potters, Peled creates her own shards using a hammer and strategic precision to create similar sized shards from both unfired and fired clay. She uses three ways to create shards: the first method is a technique used in glass blowing, called *millefiori*, which starts by rolling out thin slabs of clay. She then cuts them into feather-like shapes, and after being fired she snaps them into desired lengths. The second method involves creating thin clay slabs that are unglazed or glazed with colour, and then using a hammer to shatter the pieces.

The last method Peled uses is extruding long pieces of clay noodles and snapping them into the desired lengths. In an interview with *C-File*, Peled says that “process is crucial to my sculptural ideas”, as they are “consistent with Kabbalah concepts” (a Jewish belief about the essence of God), such as *Shevirah* (breaking of vessels) and *Tikkun* (an act that improves the world, according to Jewish teachings) that is considered as a renewal of life (Rodgers 2015).

Unlike the other two artists, Peled currently does not have an ongoing series but instead, has many collections that are either site specific or translate to different meanings. One example of this is *Maldive Vibes*, which is a large porcelain sculpture created in 2018 (Figure 6). The work emphasises the beauty of coral reefs and the many organisms that live in marine habitats. That being said, the sculpture does not have much colour, it is mostly coloured in white as it symbolises the bleaching of coral that is happening in Maldives (Peled 2017). This piece serves not just as a memory of the once living and vibrant coral reef but an encouragement for future coral reef protection.



Figure 6. Zemer Peled, *Maldive Vibes*, 2018, porcelain, 72 x 36 x 36 inches
Image: courtesy of the artist

In conclusion, porcelain has a long production history not only in China but in many other countries as well. Firstly, ceramic imports from Maritime Silk trade have led to the startup of manufacturing factories in East Asia, Central Asia and Europe as well as the increasing demand for luxurious blue and white ceramics in its international market. Secondly, during the twentieth century, porcelain was used as a form of self expression in creating sculptural, non-functional forms. This is exemplified in the *Sodeisha* group and *The American Clay Revolution*. It is also interesting to observe how the Russian government recruited porcelain and its painting techniques to the Communist cause, creating innovative and colourful designs for the purpose of propaganda. Lastly, porcelain has been utilised by contemporary artists in the twenty first century such as Johnson Tsang, Yeesoookyung, and Zemer Peled, all who are contemporary ceramic artists which use porcelain as their primary medium. Through this material, they are able to convey the turbulent emotions within themselves, the historical events that have happened in their country, and the dual narratives of nature and its environment.

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(un) Common Ground: collisions, convergence, conversations.

AMaGA National Conference
17-20 September 2024, Ballarat Victoria

By Jaquie Hagan &
Lauren Elizabeth Wallis

A nine-hour road trip or a three-hour plane and bus journey were our options in travelling from Adelaide (via Melbourne) to Ballarat – the location of the 2024 Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) National Conference (Figure 1). With proximity and means considerable factors, we opted for the latter, making travel a substantive investment in addition to conference registration and accommodation. All up, leaving little change from \$2K to attend the four-day event. However, nearing the end of our Masters degree in Curatorial and Museum Studies, we were keen to engage and gain deeper insights into the sector and of course acquire new contacts as emerging professionals. Amenable to the rich tapestry of ideas, concepts and discussions that await us – we were ready to be inspired.

The theme of the 2024 conference was *(un)Common Ground: Collisions, Convergence, Conversations*. As outlined in the conference literature, this was an invitation to Wadawurrung Country to partake in reflection and conversations about the relationships, structures and gaps that define (or constrain) our sector. An opportunity for important conversations inspired by the theme of *(un)Common Ground*, with sub themes exploring activism, coexistence, gatekeeping and innovation (AMaGA 2024, p. 3).

“(un)Common Ground is a space where old and new ideas collide, where understandings and priorities converge, and where conversations between colleagues and communities are navigated.”

Figure 1 previous page. One of Ballarat's many alleyway artworks, 2024
Image: Lauren Elizabeth Wallis

“An exploration of what brings us together and what keeps us apart. It explores the blurred boundaries where commonalities and divisions intertwine.”

The questions and discussion points posed to both speakers and delegates for consideration and comment were broad, ambitious and challenging – perhaps preaching to the converted in part, but nonetheless a catalyst for reflection within the sector (AMaGA 2024, p. 3):

Activism: Can museums and galleries genuinely be sites for activism given the entrenched power dynamics at play?

Co-existence: How can different knowledge systems co-exist with, enrich or challenge our established ways of working?

Gatekeeping: How does gatekeeping reveal itself across our sector? Is there a disconnect between community perceptions and how we see ourselves (or how we would like to be seen)?

Innovation: Have we run out of fresh ideas? Where do we find new ones?

Hosting a diverse lineup of National and International figures, delegates experienced presentations from impressive keynote speakers such as curator and director of South Korea's progressive Hzone curating company, Daehyung Lee, and filmmaker, historian and director of India's Science Gallery Bengaluru, Jahnvi Phalkey. Both shared in-depth examples of their work and the importance of social and cultural movements that drive change, addressing our civic responsibility to social relationships and future engagement. Lee profoundly summarising the role of the curator as a "context maker".

The most captivating keynotes however, were delivered by Wergaia/Wamba Wamba Elder and Chair of Victoria's Yoorrook Justice Commission, Professor Aunty Eleanor Bourke, and the first female director of UK's Manchester Museum, Esmé Ward. These exceptional individuals exuded generosity and honesty as they shared their experiences in addressing civic spirit and institutional systemic practices and injustices.

There was not a dry eye in sight as Bourke's portrayal of her involvement in Victoria's truth telling commission produced a raw and emotional account of generational trauma, validating the collective strength of First Nation's people in exposing and enduring ongoing structural disadvantage. Bourke demonstrated her unwavering advocacy for truth, understanding and transformation through education – a way for us all to share the burden, heal and engage in a re-imagination of our shared future (Figure 2).

In contrast but equally remarkable, Ward embodied an infectious exuberance as she recounted her challenges in not only transforming a 130-year-old building but an institution steeped in empire (Figure 3). Ward's refreshing approach of ensuring a “loo, brew and view” for all is underpinned by genuine compassion, empathy and a deep understanding of the Museum's contemporary local South Asian diaspora community.

Wellbeing, equity and inclusivity across museum spaces reinforce the “nothing about us without us” philosophy embraced by Ward and her team, creating the framework for ongoing community consultation and collaboration. A social justice warrior at the helm of what is now considered the most inclusive, imaginative and caring museum in the world – as emerging professionals that certainly sounds like an aspirational place to be!

At first glance and not being conference fit as “first timers”, the program appeared somewhat daunting with over 90 sessions and workshops hosted across five iconic Ballarat venues. Conveniently located within a five-minute walk of each other the Ballarat Civic Hall, The Goods Shed, Mining Exchange, Art Gallery of Ballarat and Ballarat Mechanics' Institute highlighted the extravagant opulence derived from the riches of the Gold Rush period in Ballarat during the mid-1800s (Figure 4-7).

“...an ambivalent and vexed backdrop for sensitive topics acknowledging Indigenous dispossession, disadvantage and inequality.”

These colonial structures while splendid in their historical ornamentation and stature, presented an ambivalent and vexed backdrop for sensitive topics acknowledging Indigenous dispossession, disadvantage and inequality – a common thread throughout many presentations and discussions underpinned by the broader theme of the conference.

The least palatial of all the venues and a great example of respectful restoration and adaptive reuse, The Goods Shed played host to all the opening day events including the AMaGA Awards Ceremony showcasing the most celebrated and creative exhibitions, programs and GLAM projects of 2024 (Figure 8). This extensive first day set the scene (and expectations) for the remainder of the conference – did it continue to deliver? We decided to divide and conquer to get the most out of the remaining sessions over the following days and here we share some of the highlights and lowlights in five standout sessions that resonated.



Figure 2. Professor Aunty Eleanor Bourke in conversation with Ophelia Rubinich, AIATSIS, 2024.
Image: Jaquie Hagan

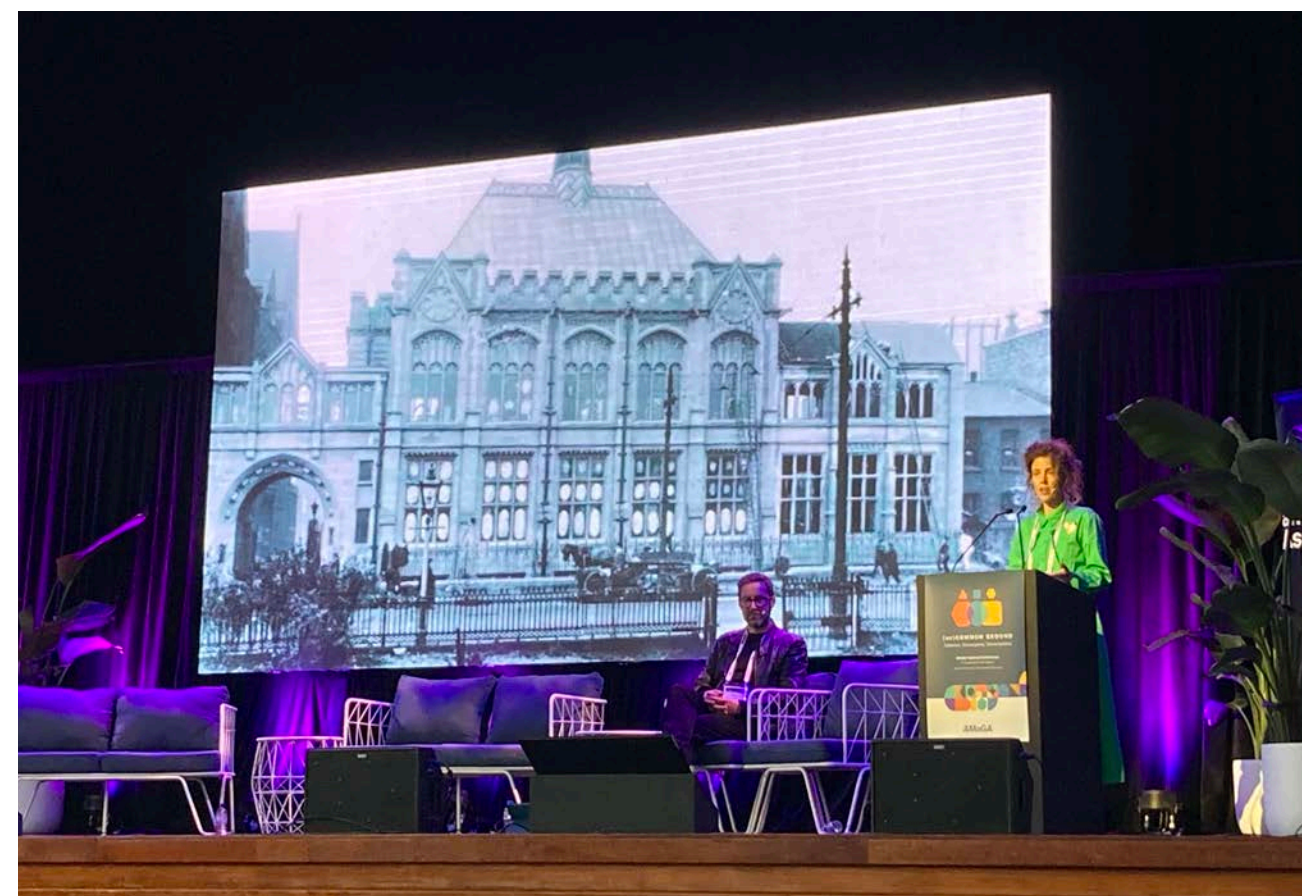


Figure 3. Esmé Ward presenting her keynote speech on Manchester Museum, 2024.
Image: Jaquie Hagan



1 Innovation; rethinking museums

A museum by any other name

Lisa Enright's talk, "But Where is My Museum?" offered a thought-provoking exploration of small museums and their role in creating intimate public spaces in Australia. Grounded in her working thesis, *Radical Conversations: Small Museums as Intimate Public Places in Australia*, she examined how these unconventional museum spaces foster meaningful connections between people, objects, and narratives.

Enright challenged traditional definitions of museums, proposing that they are not merely buildings but sets of practices. She highlighted how spaces previously unrecognised as "museum-like," such as vintage buy/sell/swap Facebook groups or small, community-run heritage sites, embody museum functions. These spaces facilitate the sharing of knowledge, preservation of stories, and exchange of objects, often through personal narratives and informal networks of collectors and dealers. While these spaces may lack professional museum staff, their activities reflect identifiable museum practices, bridging the gap between formal institutions and everyday heritage engagement.

A key theme of Enright's talk was the idea that "heritage is something that is done." This dynamic view of heritage stresses participation, where visitors are not passive consumers but active producers of meaning. In this context, small museums and alternative spaces enable conversations that are both radical and intimate, fostering a sense of shared ownership and community. She also explored the evolving role of digital spaces in museum practices. Platforms for knowledge exchange and object sharing serve as virtual museum-like entities, challenging the conventional museum definition further. These digital interactions expand access to heritage and promote inclusivity, allowing new narratives to emerge.

Previous page, top left to right:

Figure 4. *Art Gallery of Ballarat, Lydiard St Ballarat - completed 1890, 2024.* Image: Lauren Elizabeth Wallis.

Figure 5. *Mining Exchange, Lydiard St Ballarat, completed 1887, 2024.* Image: Jaquie Hagan.

Figure 6. *Mechanics' Institute, Sturt St Ballarat, completed 1870, 2024.* Image: Lauren Elizabeth Wallis.

Figure 7. *Civic Hall, Mair St Ballarat, completed 1956, 2024.* Image: Jaquie Hagan

Figure 8. *The Goods Shed, Lydiard St Ballarat, completed 1863 & renovated 2022, 2024.* Image: Lauren Elizabeth Wallis

Her reflections on small museums shed light on their critical importance to Australia's cultural landscape. Despite their size, these spaces contribute to preserving local histories and creating environments for open dialogue and cultural exchange. Enright's work encourages us to rethink what a museum can be, focusing on its practices and community impact rather than its physical structure. Through her thesis and ongoing research, Lisa Enright advocates for a broader understanding of museums, celebrating the unique role small museums play in fostering intimate, radical conversations about heritage and identity.

2 Caring for collections

Busting myths in collection care

Victoria Pearce, director and senior conservator at Endangered Heritage introduced this session by recounting a visit to a collecting institution which recently completed a safety audit. The recommendations concluded that the organisation replace their four-leg task chairs with five-leg task chairs. The report neglected to mention or advise on the plethora of potential bio hazards, radioactive and corrosive materials, off-gassing substances or degrading plasticisers in their collection which are handled by collection staff and volunteers with little to no training on how to do so.

Prior to attending this session I anticipated gaining some further knowledge on conservation practices and hearing about some interesting collection projects. What I left with, was somewhat more triggering and a revelation regarding "new" and everyday hazardous materials being collected and the insufficient resources, knowledge and practices of many collecting institutions to mitigate such degradation.

An object can convey a pertinent historical story, but in-turn harbour a cocktail of hazards where the risk outweighs the benefit. In addition to the more obvious hazardous materials such as asbestos and lead, my anxiety piqued as Pearce listed the top offenders which should NOT be collected unless there is a robust documentation and disposal policy in place:

Carbon “buckyballs” (Buckminster fullerene) & Carbon Nanotubes “CNT”

Strong and lightweight these particles are used in industrial hard coatings, flat panel displays and touch screens, ubiquitous sensors such as health tech devices and flexible body electronics. These fit into the broader category of IoT (Internet of Things), the collective network of connected devices. With an estimated 20 year lifespan, the breakdown of these particles (if inhaled) can result in lung damage not dissimilar to asbestoses.

Resins

Likewise with a 20 year lifespan, resins are widely integrated into general applications from paints, glues, coatings and plastics through to specific electrical products, jewellery and decorative objects. Of particular concern, exposure to decomposing particles can cause skin and lung irritations such as dermatitis, asthma and more severely can impact the central nervous system.

Toluene Diiso-cynate

A releasing agent used in the moulding of foams producing a hazardous residue that breaks down in polyurethane foam. Depending on the specific foam and use, expected lifespan can be anywhere up to 50 years. The concern with all of these materials is accurate documentation of previous use to determine appropriate storage, handling and remediation. Particularly problematic in costume or fashion collections where foam is used in shoulder pads and bras. The advice is to remove these items of padding from textile collections now to avoid more drastic remediation in the future. Exposure to toxic off-gasses and crumbling matter can cause skin and lung irritations, in addition to gooey substances that can compromise the integrity of adjacent materials.

So how do we keep our history safe? In short – budget allocation to hazards when developing a collection management plan. In addition, engage in a hazards audit and develop policy about documentation and disposal, incorporating a flag on both the object and database. Conduct remediation to existing stores, appropriate de-accessioning plan and most of all weigh up the cost benefit of keeping objects or even collecting them in the first place.

Key takeaways – there is no dedicated federal or state Heritage Minister, so educating government bodies and councils on the dangers of collecting history is crucial. All collecting institutions regardless of size should invest in a radiation dosimeter. Finally, have a realistic disaster plan and disaster kit capable of mitigating hazardous materials that have potential to drastically magnify during a disaster – in our current climate, be prepared.

**3 Innovation and gaming
Playful Museum Experiences**

The “Playful Museum Experiences” session, presented by PhD students, Sophia Booij and Nellie Seale, explored how play can transform museum engagement by fostering multimodal, interactive, and dialogic learning experiences. They highlighted that play is inherently polyphonic, encouraging discussion and participation, which enhances how visitors absorb knowledge. The speakers discussed various types of museum games, emphasising that designing these experiences requires careful consideration of integration into the museum environment, location, goals, time constraints, format, and gameplay mechanics. Each element contributes to creating meaningful and memorable visitor interactions.

Booij and Seale drew on several examples of successful playful initiatives in the GLAM sector, underscoring the value of game-based learning. Notable examples included the *Karrawirra Parri Journey*, a Kaurna-inspired board game developed by the History Trust of South Australia, which integrates cultural storytelling and engagement. The Hellenic Museum’s *Mysterion: Descent into Hades* brought history to life through live-action role-play, immersing participants in ancient mythological narratives. The *Home of the Blizzard* exhibit, by the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA), featured historical interactive fiction that invited visitors to explore stories in a dynamic and engaging way. Other notable projects included Re-Collect at Science Gallery Melbourne and *The Ark*, a megagame developed by the Powerhouse Museum. Both projects exemplified how playful approaches could provoke thought and invite collaboration among participants.

The session also delved into GLAM game design principles, drawing on theoretical frameworks from Mulcahy and Witcomb (2018), David Schaller (2014), and Brenda Romero (2009). These scholars emphasise the importance of designing interactive experiences that are participatory, planned, and collaborative. Booij and Seale outlined the game design process, which includes planning, development, and rigorous testing to ensure accessibility and engagement.

Ultimately, the session highlighted how play can create enriching, immersive experiences that make museum spaces more inclusive and dynamic. By prioritising interactivity and participation, museums can reimagine how they engage audiences, making cultural and historical narratives more accessible to all.

**4 Gatekeeping
You shall not Pass!**

Def’n:

The activity of trying to control who gets particular resources, power or opportunities, and who does not (McIntosh 2013).

My comprehension of gatekeeping growing up was very literal and ruefully stemmed from the fictitious mythological narrative in Ivan Reitman’s 1984 *Ghostbusters* movie. Here, the “Gatekeeper” (Sigourney Weaver) was unrelenting in denying access to the realm of Gozer, with exception of the “Keymaster” (Rick Moranis). Despite its simplistic depiction, the two roles were co-dependent – the existence of one was somewhat redundant without the other.

However, in a professional context I have come to understand the real-life implications and impacts of the “Gatekeeper” and as an emerging professional entering the GLAM sector I have consistently experienced gatekeeping as I endeavour to unlock opportunities that are bestowed upon the “Keymaster”.

Chief experience officer at Australian Museum, Russell Briggs playfully expanded on this concept from the view inside the gates in the session aptly titled, *You shall not Pass! How to break barriers and become an enlightened gatekeeper*. Leaning into a *Lord of the Rings* analogy, Briggs underscored the historical association between leadership and gatekeeping in a museum context, where 19th century hierarchical frameworks remain the norm and managers’ responsibilities are embedded within a “blame culture”.

In an attempt to move beyond these frameworks, Briggs explores how to turn gatekeeping into a positive with key drivers such as, trust and empowerment, getting people involved early, total transparency, feedback that listens and developing leaders rather than delegating work. Expanding further with two proposed qualities that define a good gatekeeper. The first being in the initial undefined stages of a project where recognising instinctual drivers through self reflection is key. The second and more challenging is to trust and listen by building confidence in others abilities to make decisions. A pathway to embodying these gatekeeper qualities may be attained by following a modern gatekeeping checklist:

- ☐ Field a team
- ☐ Nurture the work community
- ☐ Become an expert in listening
- ☐ Gentle influence
- ☐ Understand the project status
- ☐ Grasp the financial implications
- ☐ Reward success

Gatekeeping can be experienced from many perspectives in a museum context, from community to an employee or candidate, and as a student searching for that elusive key. Acknowledging gatekeeping within the sector is admirable but employing strategies to change gatekeeping culture is desirable, with critical work still to be done. Above all, as Briggs summarised, the best gatekeepers are the ones that don’t hang gates.

5 National Networks Emerging professionals

Our final session of the conference, and one of the most pertinent for us, was the Emerging Professionals networking session. The meeting provided an invaluable forum for emerging voices in the museum sector to connect, share experiences, and discuss challenges. Chaired by Emma Haddy from the History Trust of South Australia, the panel included Kalindi Hopping (Tweed Regional Museum), Lucy Theile (History Trust of South Australia), and Molly Culbertson (Burke Museum). Together, they facilitated an open and honest discussion about navigating the complex and often competitive museum industry.

First and foremost, the session created a safe and supportive space for emerging professionals to express the difficulties of entering and advancing within the sector. The panellists openly discussed the barriers they faced as emerging female professionals striving to leave their mark and build their careers. From unpaid internships to limited job opportunities, they highlighted the persistent challenges postgraduate students encounter in gaining meaningful professional experience—a key stepping stone to securing long-term roles.

Despite these difficulties, the speakers brought energy and inspiration to the conversation by showcasing the innovative and impactful work happening at their museums. Kalindi Hopping shared insights into Tweed Regional Museum's dynamic community engagement strategies, specifically their Museum on Wheels - aka the MoW. This innovative outreach initiative brings the museum experience directly to their local community, appearing at festivals, markets and other events in the Tweed area. This mobile exhibition showcases local history, artifacts, and interactive displays, making cultural heritage accessible to diverse audiences and fostering engagement beyond the museum's physical walls.

Lucy Theile, a Visitor Engagement Officer at the History Trust of South Australia, highlighted the *Open Palaces Programme*, an immersive initiative offering participants exclusive access to historic houses, palaces, and cultural institutions across the United Kingdom. The program provides hands-on experiences, behind-the-scenes insights, and professional development opportunities, enabling emerging professionals to deepen their understanding of heritage management while networking with experts in the field.

Molly Culbertson discussed the Burke Museum's commitment to decolonising practices, emphasising its evolving approach to inclusivity and representation, moving away from the traditional 'white man' narrative. She highlighted the museum's multiple name changes as part of a broader strategy to embrace more inclusive storytelling and accurately represent diverse voices and histories in its exhibits.

The session also emphasised the importance of building professional networks and finding mentors to help navigate the complexities of the field. The speakers encouraged emerging museum professionals to seek out collaborative opportunities, share their unique perspectives, and remain resilient in the face of challenges. Ultimately, this event underscored both the struggles and the potential of working in the museum sector. It left attendees with a renewed sense of camaraderie, inspiration, and motivation to continue advocating for their place within the industry while contributing to its evolution.

Conference takeaways

The 2024 AMaGA National Conference provided a blend of inspiring insights and significant shortcomings. While it successfully brought to light crucial themes such as activism, co-existence, gatekeeping, and innovation, the experience for first-time attendees and emerging professionals left room for improvement.

The conference addressed the question of museums as sites for activism through keynote speakers like Professor Aunty Eleanor Bourke and Esmé Ward, who showcased how institutions can confront entrenched power dynamics and foster inclusivity. However, the broader conversation on activism often highlighted the barriers that persist due to institutional structures. Regarding co-existence, sessions and discussions effectively demonstrated how diverse knowledge systems could challenge and enrich traditional practices. The emphasis on incorporating First Nations voices, particularly in truth-telling and decolonisation, exemplified meaningful collaboration.

The gatekeeping session directly confronted the hierarchical structures and "blame culture" embedded in the sector with some useful tools for breaking down barriers. This resonated strongly, especially for emerging professionals navigating a sector still fraught with exclusivity. However, the conference itself fell short

in this area, with limited opportunities for emerging professionals outside the one single networking session on the final day. On innovation, the conference proved that fresh ideas are abundant, with sessions like "Playful Museum Experiences" and "But Where is My Museum?" showcasing creative approaches to engagement and rethinking museum practices. Yet, the question remains whether the sector is equipped to translate these ideas into widespread change.

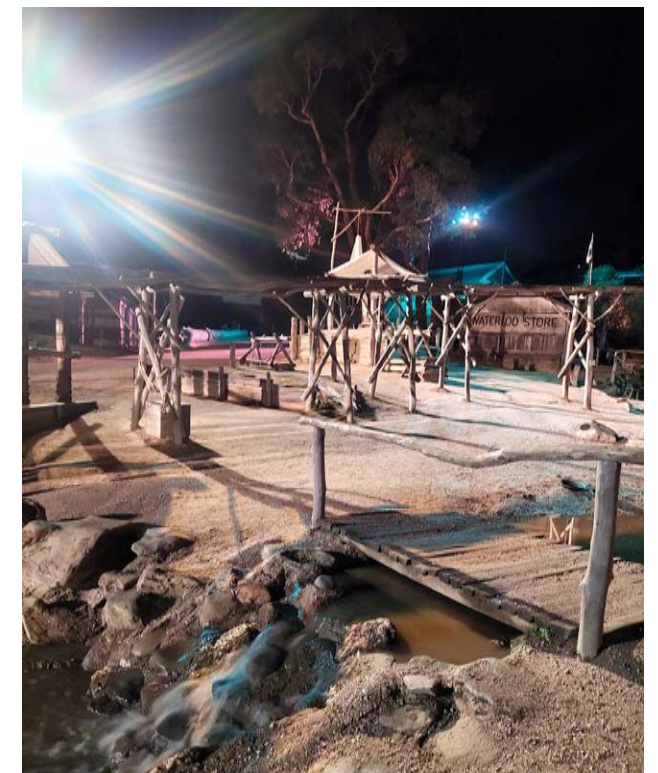
Practical aspects of the conference, such as the First Timers' breakfast, was poorly executed, leaving new attendees feeling undervalued (Figure 9). However, the evening events, particularly the Sovereign Hill tour and dinner (Figure 10) and after-dark Ballarat Art Gallery tour (Figure 11), provided immersive and memorable experiences that showcased the region's rich heritage. Ultimately, the conference offered valuable reflections but highlighted the need for greater inclusivity and support, especially for emerging professionals. Addressing these shortcomings would ensure the sector is better equipped to navigate the challenges and opportunities of (un)Common Ground.



Figure 9 (top). *Humffray Room Mechanics' Institute* - location of the First Timers Breakfast with no tables, facilitator or coffee! After paying an additional fee to attend this event on top of our conference fee, we were confronted with rows of seats and help-yourself cold pre-packaged cereals, 2024. Image: Lauren Elizabeth Wallis.

Figure 10 (right). *Night time Sovereign Hill tour and dinner*, 2024. Image: Lauren Elizabeth Wallis.

Figure 11 (above). *Louise Tegar, Director Art Gallery of Ballarat discussing "CoalMo" AKA Coal Morrison resin and coal sculpture (2022) by Louise Pratt and Rob Beamish*, 2024. Image: Jaquie Hagan.



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“The past is not done with us.”

– Rusty Kelty



Re-claiming Heritage Symposium

By Susan Millbank

Reclaiming Heritage Symposium: 28/29 October 2024 was funded by the School of Humanities, Faculty of Arts, Business, Law and Economics, University of Adelaide, and hosted by the Museum and Curatorial Studies Program at the University in collaboration with the South Australian Museum

Rusty Kelty’s prophetic words were addressed to the large crowd at The University of Adelaide’s Reclaiming Heritage Symposium in late October 2024. Kelty, Asian Art Curator at the Art Gallery of South Australia, spoke about curatorial responsibility and the practicalities of restitution, including diligence in provenance research, transparency, safe keeping places and international collaboration through the story of the 2019 return of Shiva Nataraja to India from the Art Gallery of South Australia. His statement, and his discussion on the important principles for reclaiming cultural heritage, invoked a reflection on the Symposium’s themes and its earlier speakers, including the keynote address by Professor Dan Hicks from Oxford University – in part because Kelty’s statement leads to a counter question – But are we done with the past?

This question seems ever more present with the emergence of ‘fortress nationalism’, a colloquial term describing a significant movement in Europe, the USA, and elsewhere. Over the last decade, the aim of fortress nationalism has been to “preserve and protect an embattled national identity and culture...by sharply limiting immigration and using state power for culturally conservative ends” (Douthat 2024; Brands 2017). Rejecting globalisation and integration, this political move to the right seeks to restore post World War II ideas about sovereignty and identity.

Figure 1 previous page. Benin Bronze relief plaque, standing figure
Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence. Af1898,0115.36.

¹ For the purpose of clarity in this review repatriation will refer the process by which cultural objects are returned to a nation or state at the request of a government: restitution is where cultural objects are returned to an individual or community – see collectionstrust.org.uk

It could be argued, then, that western nations are less likely to critically review their earlier histories, and this may impact on decisions about returning cultural artefacts held in museums and galleries that were questionably acquired in the past. Whether this past is one of settler colonisation or colonial imperialism, the return of cultural heritage artefacts and remains of ancestors continues to be contested centuries later. Politics has always been a leading player in this contest and continues to be so.

Perhaps this is one reason why an unspoken theme of the Symposium was that repatriation, (or restitution, or reclamation), is now about the ‘how’, rather than the ‘why’ or ‘whether’. Encouraging ethical repatriation and restitution efforts was an important driver for the Symposium, seeking to move beyond the difficult politics of repatriation and decolonisation. The website spoke to its rationale:

“Reclaiming Heritage will bring together leading voices from the world of museums, cultural heritage, and academia to address the critical issue of repatriating cultural objects, with a special focus on the Benin Bronzes (Figure 1)... (it) offers a platform for meaningful dialogue on the ethical dimensions of repatriation and decolonisation...”¹

Culture Wars = History + Politics + Culture

Professor Hicks set the ball rolling in his keynote address, calling attention to the failure of institutions (including museums, art galleries and universities as well as governments) to acknowledge and address past wrongs by returning stolen or otherwise questionably acquired artefacts of cultural significance (read looted, spoliation, inequitably traded) (Figure 2). He argued that the traditional role of museums, which has included memorialising history's past wrongs, is done. It is time, he said, to reimagine their role for the future - and this includes returning dubiously acquired cultural artefacts by restoring ownership to their culture and/or country of origin.

He spoke about the importance of cultural symbols, the problematic ethics of 'taking', and 'white fabulation' - when "art and culture was weaponised from the 1880's to the 1920's"².

In Britain, and elsewhere, the physical manifestation of 'white fabulation' included (but was not limited to) erecting statues dedicated to slave traders and others who directly and indirectly generated their wealth from this activity. It included the founding and funding of university departments and institutions from the profits of colonisation gained through the exploitation and displacement of First Nations people. And it included the holding and display of the dispossessed's cultural objects and ancestral remains in museums and galleries around the world. Professor Hicks argued the culture wars continue into the 21st century, and that the contribution of some institutions to the present-day culture wars is to continue to own and display questionably acquired cultural artefacts, and to do so without proper and full attribution. He argues that repatriation or restitution of questionably acquired artefacts and ancestor remains is, therefore, justified.



Figure 2. Professor Dan Hicks – discussing *White Fabulation* at the Symposium, 2024. Image: Susan Millbank

² Refer to forthcoming book - Dan Hicks 'Every Monument will fall: a prehistory of the culture war'. Penguin 2025.

Some museums and scholars including Neil MacGregor, past Director of the British Museum and James Cuno contest this thesis (Cuno, 2011). Their view is that the 'universal' museums' role is to provide a global context for understanding humanity across civilisations and time periods. In the specific case of the Benin Bronze objects (Figure 3), other commentators argue that conditions must be satisfied if objects are to be returned (Phillips 2021; Frum 2023); and a legal argument against their repatriation was set out by Cooper, (2021).

However, most observers would agree that whichever side of the fence you are on, the arguments for and against repatriation/restitution are essentially politically motivated, and that decolonisation is the constant historical theme. Moreover, recently other political influences have emerged, including the aforementioned 'fortress nationalism' as well as shifts in global power in Europe, Asia, and elsewhere. In the shadow of these power shifts, the use of 'soft' diplomacy in international relations is a tool spoken about more often, including its capacity to impact on reclaiming heritage negotiations. The effects these contemporary global movements may have on the return of cultural heritage artefacts deepens the political parameters around repatriation and restitution, and 'culture wars'.

"The concept of 'white fabulation' is firmly pitched to counter the weaponisation of cultural appropriation..."

More recently, in Australia, the 'culture wars' detoured from the UK experience. In 2008 in relation to an apology to the stolen generation, past Prime Minister John Howard stated "I do not believe, as a matter of principle, that one generation can accept responsibility for the acts of an earlier generation" (Davies 2008). On the other side, past Premier of NSW, Bob Carr stated we must "avoid romanticising uncritically the post-1788 settlement of Australia." (Burke 2024), and it is not too long ago that (then) Prime Minister Paul Keating delivered the Redfern address (1992), sparking a conservative backlash. A more recent example is the cultural divide over the 2023 Voice Referendum.

It can be argued then that in Australia 'culture wars' are more aligned with the effects of colonialism on First Nations people and national identity, and perhaps this brings another element to Professor Hicks' starting point of 'white fabulation'. All countries are different, and no country has a clean past.

The concept of 'white fabulation' is firmly pitched to counter the weaponisation of cultural appropriation and memorialising the wrongs of the past particularly associated with colonisation. Yet, a question arises whether it contributes to a deeper understanding of the issues, or creates a more polemic discourse? 'Culture wars' is an emotive term - it is political and divisive. An important question is whether we can get beyond the divisiveness of the debate. Would a deeper assessment of the distinctive nature, history and impact of the 'culture wars' in Australasia help in finding a way through this question? It could be said that wrongfully removed cultural heritage artefacts and ancestor remains, their stories, and their location are the tangible symbols trapped in the 'culture wars' dichotomy. And so would repatriation gain more support if it was less contentious, less politicised, and more focussed on its positive elements (e.g., strengthening and healing communities)? These questions were flagged indirectly by the Symposium.



Figure 3. Benin Bronze – Bode Museum Berlin
Image: Francisco Anzola via Flickr, licensed under CCBY 2.0.

Significance of Return

For a first hand understanding of the importance of return to communities, the Symposium turned to speakers from First Nations communities. If the ‘how’ was still somehow unresolved, the ‘why’ was unambiguously set out by First Nations people speaking about the meaning of restitution and reconciliation when cultural objects and ancestral remains are returned to their community and Country. Presenters from AIATSIS, Mithaka Aboriginal Corporation, Kaurareg Native Title Aboriginal Corporation, Larrakia Development Corporation, the Warlpiri Project, and Iga Warta Community were inspiring in their passion, forthrightness, and the importance of restitution. Though each speaker told their unique story about their journey to return their cultural heritage and ancestral remains (Figure 4), the political (and in some instances the bureaucratic) atmosphere, along with the effects of rising seas and climate change (Figure 5), were identified as ever present threats to their efforts.

Respect, for culture and ancestors, was a powerful message from these presentations. Consistent answers to ‘why’ emerged. Firstly, the importance of restitution to meaning, identity, and the strengthening of communities through healing and wellbeing; secondly, ensuring continuity of community by sharing culture, particularly with young people and others; and thirdly, the primacy of community in decision making, in part because bureaucracy is slow and sometimes wrong. And it was here that oral traditions and cultural rites banged up against the western epistemologies of documented history and provenance, politics, and legal conventions, particularly as the onus appears to be more on First Nations communities to prove their cultural ties to objects and ancestor remains.

Navigating through this potential blockage emerged as an important way finder for the return journey and clearly depends on trust - in and by all parties. So some clear signals about the ‘how’ also emerged from these presentations.

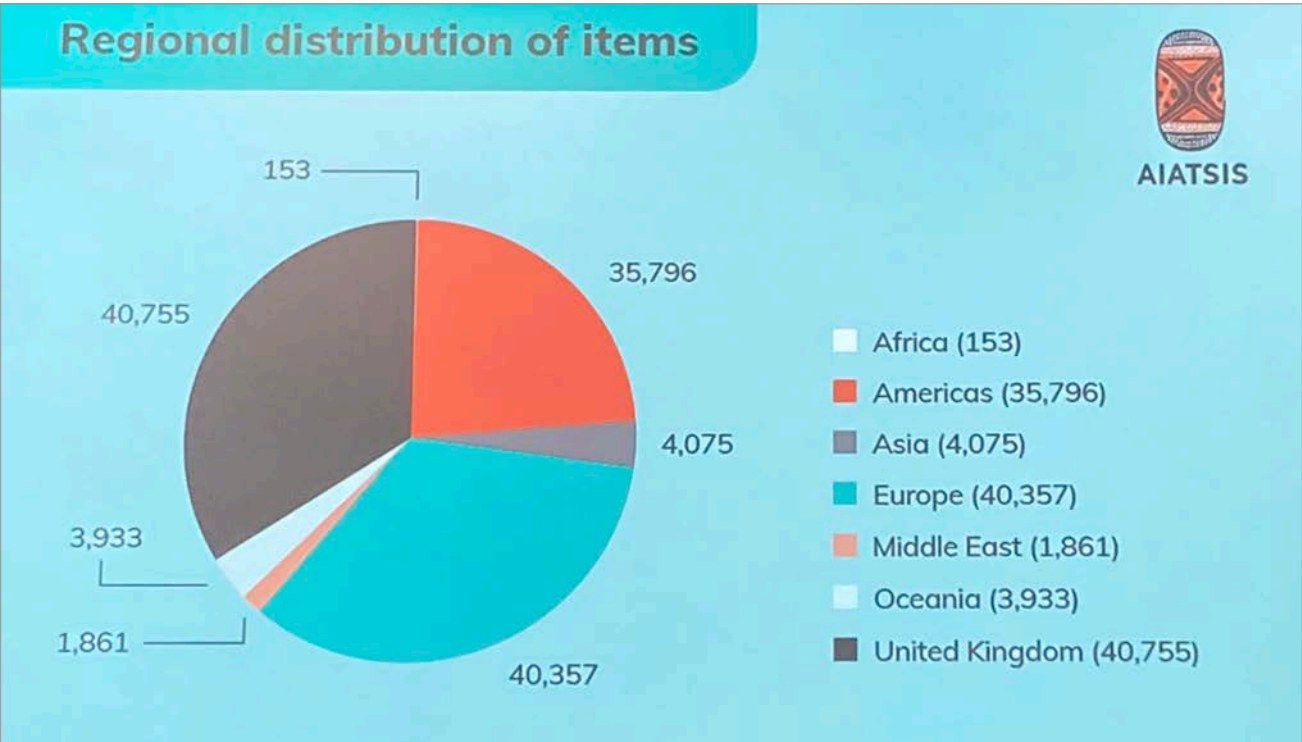


Figure 4. Slide from AIATSIS presentation; graph showing distribution of First Nation heritage items across the globe. Image: Susan Millbank

Problems with Policies

Perhaps spotlighting these epistemological problems was the presentation from Anna Russo about the South Australian Museum’s (SAM) process to develop its Restitution of Cultural Heritage policy in 2020.

“SAM’s Board took the view that including inequality as one criterion would most likely result in many exhibits being withdrawn or returned...”

Stumbling at the first hurdle in 2019 because SAM’s Board took the view that including inequality as one criterion would most likely result in many exhibits being withdrawn or returned, further revisions and consultations were conducted. The policy was approved 12 months later³.

New Zealand’s Canterbury Museum Deputy Director Sarah Murray spoke about its approach to repatriation/ restitution which, while underpinned by important values (people, respect, generosity), raised problems for repatriation of artefacts held in New Zealand back to overseas nations. These difficulties included time zones, language, and, importantly, resourcing, where the Museum is primarily funded to bring home Māori ancestor remains and some objects, but not to return cultural heritage to other nations. Reference was made here to the fifteen Benin Bronze objects still held by the Museum even though a request for their return was received in 2021.

The two speakers from museums highlighted the politicisation of repatriation and restitution in the bureaucratic vernacular of budget allocations, policy development, and priorities. These practicalities are not insignificant for institutions reliant on the public purse. Finding ways to expand funding sources and engage broader community support for the return of ownership of cultural heritage artefacts was flagged as an ongoing challenge for the museum and gallery sector.

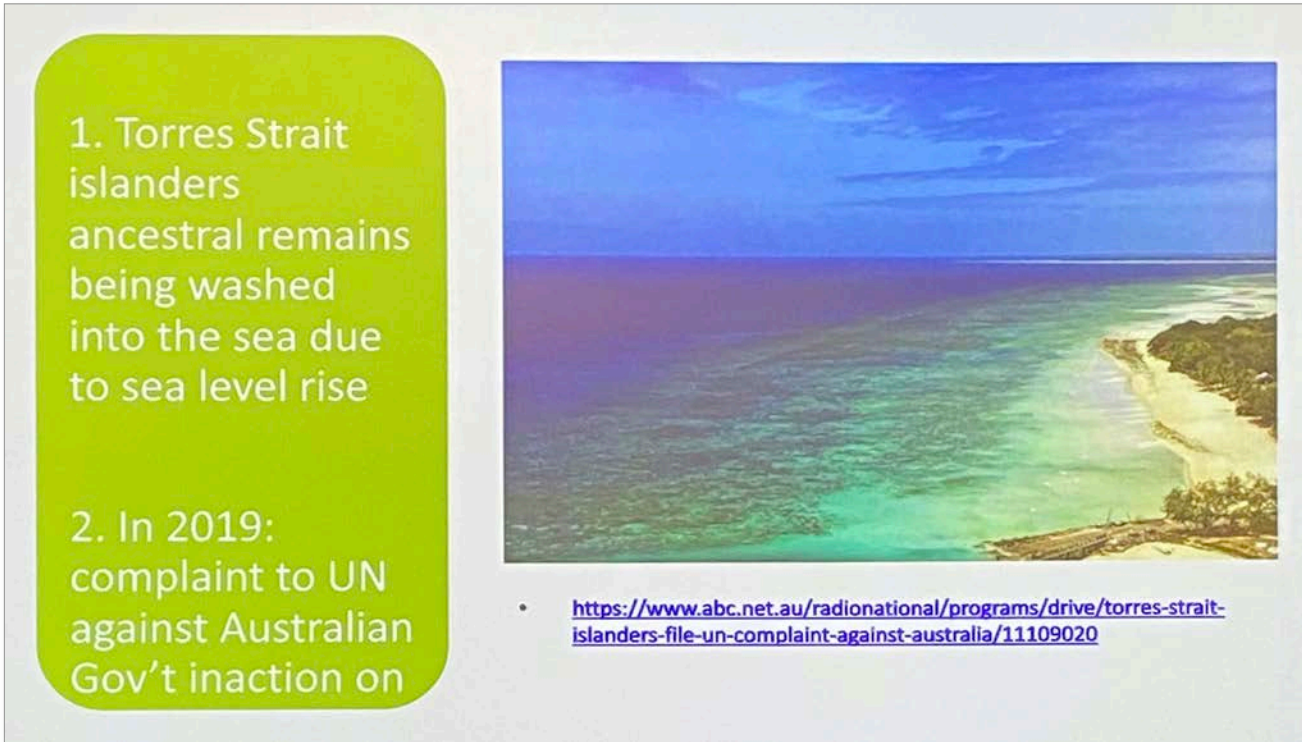


Figure 5. Slide from Kaurareg Native Title Aboriginal Corporation presentation, Torres Strait Island; impact of climate change on ancestor remains. Image: Susan Millbank

³ The word ‘inequality’ is not in the approved policy document, though it could be argued its intent is there.

Cultural Property: possession = rights

Referencing the Benin Bronze objects in his keynote address Professor Hicks did not specifically state artefacts of cultural significance should be returned to their country/place of origin. Rather, he asserted that the ownership of these objects should be returned. This, of course, does not rule out the artefacts being physically returned, but it would put ownership in the hands of the objects' cultural inheritors, ensuring that the power of decision-making about their location, display, and their story-telling vests with the culturally appropriate owners.

A different question around property was raised by Professor Martin Polkinghorne in his descriptively titled presentation 'Reuniting Orphaned Cargoes' concerning the underwater cultural heritage salvaged from the many shipwrecks in South East Asia. He reflected on the amount of Indonesian legislation concerning shipwrecked cargo since 1965 (13 Acts), (Figure 6) along with UNESCO agreements and integrating scientific and cultural knowledge to determine the cultural inheritors of salvaged artefacts. The presentation offered another facet to questions around property, ownership, return, and rightful inheritors of cultural artefacts - in this case, those salvaged after centuries on the seabed.

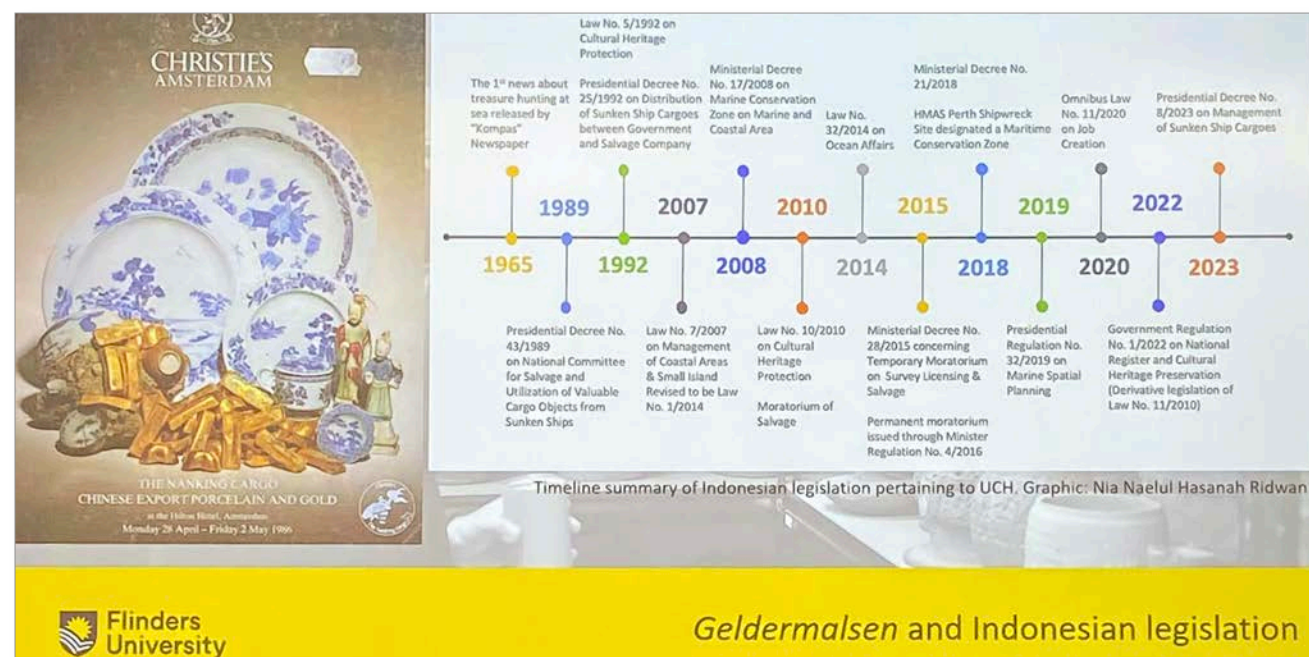


Figure 6. Slide from Professor Polkinghorne's presentation; chart of Indonesian legislation concerning Underwater Cultural Heritage objects. Image: Susan Millbank

"...those who committed wrongs in the past are long dead..."

Unsurprisingly, legal arguments based on western principles of property have been made for not returning cultural artefacts, particularly those questionably removed in colonial times. Briefly canvassed, this discourse plays out on the historical roundabout in that the return of objects may be based on false grounds. It contends that those who committed wrongs in the past are long dead, as are those who suffered those wrongs. On this basis, the argument goes that the current day 'owners' are blameless, and the wrong people would be compensated if objects were returned. Another position put is that looting was legitimate in warfare in the 19th century and it is therefore wrong to assert that looted artefacts were stolen (Cooper 2021). Further, some maintain that artefacts were not unfairly traded in the past because judgements based on current day standards are anachronistic and, as discussed, others have argued that the return of ownership of cultural artefacts can be problematic where there are security concerns. (The strength of this latter proposition has been diluted somewhat in light of the recent exposure of the failure of the British Museum to secure many of its ancient artefacts.)

These arguments are based, in part, on the 'rights' of possessors. And so the concept of property, with its wingman ownership, cannot be avoided in conversations about repatriation or restitution.

"... the relationship of cultural heritage artefacts to the legal principles of property is not so simple."

Property in legal terms comes with imputed rights linked to ownership, and these rights (such as the right to use, transfer, and sell) are heavily weighted in favour of the possessor. But the relationship of cultural heritage artefacts to the legal principles of property is not so simple. Where cultural heritage is concerned, it has been argued that these rights should also recognise the link to cultural identity and include important responsibilities such as caretaker responsibility, strengthening communities, preservation, and safe keeping places (Palmer 2022).

To preserve the important connection to cultural identity the concept of a 'cultural heritage title' for artefacts of significance has been proposed (Campfens 2020). A cultural heritage title would provide for certain rights for the cultural inheritors and consequently serve to strengthen cultural identity, and potentially enhance the significance of the object/s. A different view is that cultural property belongs to all of humanity (Merryman 1986) - a position that supports the universal museum (Cuno 2011).

It was important that the concept of returning 'ownership' of objects was introduced at the Symposium, in both the keynote address and other presentations, including those from First Nations contributors. An extended, nuanced, and multi-disciplinary discussion about property, rights, ownership, cultural title, and identity, as well as how this could, or could not, contribute to reclaiming cultural heritage, may have added another intriguing and insightful dimension to the Symposium - especially in relation to the ownership of the Benin Bronzes.

⁴ Digital Benin. <https://digitalbenin.org/institutions>

⁵ SA Museum Act 1976, Section 13 (3); National Gallery Act 1975, Section 9 - noting here the Minister approves the resolution of the NGA Council (s.9 (5) (b)). This is different to the British Museum where deaccessioning can only take place by an Act of UK Parliament (unless the object is a duplicate).

Benin Bronzes - morals and ethics of return

The special focus of the Symposium included these objects because, although Australian and New Zealand institutions are not unique internationally, the twenty-eight Benin Bronzes held in Australasian museums and galleries remain in display cases in SAM (four objects), the National Gallery of Australia (NGA - nine), and Canterbury Museum NZ (fifteen)⁴. There is some irony here - because Australia and New Zealand, each with a British settler/colonial history, continue to hold and display these cultural artefacts even though they were looted during Britain's colonisation of another country.

"Are Australasia's institutions memorialising past wrongs?"

Can it therefore be argued that, while Australia and New Zealand were not colonial powers in the vein of Britain, France, Germany and other European nations, we too have engaged in cultural appropriation in the past? By displaying objects dubiously sourced, Professor Hicks' question applies - are Australasia's institutions memorialising past wrongs? He remarked that Australasian museums need to step up and consider options around returning ownership of the Benin Bronze objects held in their collection.

We know that Nigeria has been actively pursuing the return of objects held internationally for some years and, in Australia, state and national legislation enables the governing bodies of SAM and the NGA to decide on deaccessioning artefacts⁵. The four objects held by SAM were acquired well before the 1970 UNESCO Convention came into operation (acquired 1900)⁶, as were all fifteen objects held in Canterbury Museum (between 1889-1904). However, the nine objects held by the NGA were acquired during the period 1973-1980 - after Australia signed the 1970 UNESCO Convention⁷. Ultimately, the return of objects may be a political decision for the government/s of the day because all objects are of international significance, and consequently garner international interest.

⁶ Refer to article on p. 30 for the significance of these four objects.

⁷ Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property - adopted 1971. As was the case with a number of countries, it took over a decade for the Commonwealth of Australia to pass the supporting legislation, Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986.

It was therefore unfortunate that we did not hear from SAM and NGA about these objects. Many observers would take issue with the above legal position, and the claims of the universal museum, and argue it is morally and ethically right to return stolen or looted property as this goes some way to rectifying historical injustices. There are contemporary examples of nation states endorsing this position, including nations recently legislating the return of artefacts and artworks stolen by National Socialist Germany to former owners or their inheritors.

The presentations from AIATSIS, Warlpiri Project, and other First Nations presenters offered insights into the process for return, demonstrating that in 21st century Australia, ethical practice hovers around social justice and inclusion, recognising the importance of cultural identity, strengthening communities, cultural property rights, and restorative principles. It can be said these same principles are relevant to the Benin Bronze objects.

The Symposium

The Symposium was timely and instructive. It addressed many practical issues and was an important reminder that the politics and processes of repatriation and restitution always need attention. We learnt that there have been some (hard won) gains in the return of artefacts and the remains of ancestors for First Nations communities in Australia and New Zealand. Astonishingly, these successes have been achieved by First Nations people despite problems such as divergent epistemological frameworks, climate change, policies and slow decision making, political culture wars, funding shortfalls, and the practicalities associated with ensuring safe keeping places.

Yet while this is certainly cause for some celebration - but not relaxation - it is difficult to reconcile these gains with Australasian institutions not engaging in the return of ownership of objects of international significance, particularly the Benin Bronzes. While there were many positive takeaways from the Symposium, this remained a puzzling element. Why is this so? The Symposium shone a bright light on this contradiction.

We were also reminded that while confronting the past is not easy, it is important. It enables us to learn from past mistakes, develop critical thinking about today and tomorrow, and contextualise knowledge. But it is uncomfortable in the political world, in part because politics is ephemeral, future oriented, and always contested. Politics (national and international), epistemological differences, funding and priorities, and navigating the morals, ethics, and law around 'property' and return are difficult topics to confront.

Just as we acknowledge positive elements from the past that have contributed to today's society, moving beyond the culture wars and acknowledging past wrongs is a starting point for the repatriation/restitution journey. Because this helps us to look forward. Recognising the importance of cultural identity, its links to cultural heritage and its symbols, and reimagining the role of museums, are important, as foretold by many speakers at the Symposium. We now know that reclaiming cultural heritage is a long journey, and as the last speaker reminded us, 'the past is not done with us'. Yet we must continue to examine and confront our past including its wrongs, lest we repeat the wrongs in future - or worse, consider them precedents to justify our actions in a rapidly changing world. The Symposium served to keep our focus on that journey, and offered an opportunity to reflect on contemporary museum practices.



Figure 7. Benin Bronze plaques – British Museum.
Image: Joy of museums, Wikimedia Commons, licensed CCBY-SA 4.0
Figure 8 opposite page. Reclaiming Heritage Symposium media.
Image: courtesy The University of Adelaide

Reclaiming Heritage Symposium: The Repatriation of Stolen Cultural Objects in the Post-Colonial Era

Hosted by Curatorial and Museum Studies Program

Tuesday 29 October 2024
Napier Lecture Theatre G03, Napier Building
10:00am - 5:00pm



THE UNIVERSITY
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150 YEARS



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The Art of Curation lecture series at The University of Adelaide

Dr Ania Kotarba-Morley

The *Art of Curation* lecture series initiated at the start of 2024 by Dr Ania Kotarba and hosted by the Curatorial and Museum Studies Program at The University of Adelaide, featured four public lectures by experts in the field that year. The “AoC” series has grown with an increasingly grand vision bringing together thought leaders, innovators, and practitioners in the field of curation from South Australia, interstate and overseas. The events celebrated the achievements and the insights from our guests and were aimed at creating networking opportunities for Curatorial and Museum students and emerging professionals. Three out of four events were sold out gathering over 200 attendees.

Dr David Gaimster (February 22, 2024) of the South Australian Museum delivered the inaugural keynote speech in the Elder Hall on the future of museums, discussing the changing environment in which the modern museum operates, and how this will inform our future purpose, curatorial practice, and broadcast model. Dr Gaimster explored these questions in the context of re-imagining the South Australian Museum for the 21st century.

Professor Gaye Sculthorpe (April 2, 2024), a crucial voice in the field of museum studies and Indigenous cultural heritage, delivered a masterclass titled *Exhibiting Indigenous Australia at Home and Abroad* during which she critically explored the complexities involved in curating exhibitions that represent Indigenous Australia. She covered a range of critical issues including the principles of Indigenous collaboration, criteria for selecting objects, diverse strategies for interpretation, strategies for engaging audiences, and the significance of research in curatorial practice. Additionally, Gaye discussed the aftermath of exhibitions, focusing on their legacy and the contentious issue of repatriating cultural objects to Australian and international museums.

Professor Lynette Russell (May 9, 2024), an award-winning historian and Indigenous studies scholar, presented a public lecture on *When Art and History meet (and it's not art-history)*. In her talk Russell considered the myriad ways that historians can use art as an archive and resource, and the way that art curators contribute to historical discourse. She explored the interdisciplinary connections, synergies, and tensions through case studies: the mammoth exhibition that the National Gallery of Victoria hosted in 2018, *Colony* and the production of ghost net sculptures made from discarded and lost fishing nets. Her talk included a plea for all Indigenous historians to explore the interdisciplinary world of material culture, including museum collections, rock art, and even souvenir art.

Professor Dan Hicks (October 28, 2024), a leading international voice in cultural heritage repatriation and restitution, delivered a final talk of the year titled *White Fabulation: a prehistory of the 'culture war'*. This lecture introduced themes from Hicks' forthcoming book, *Every Monument Will Fall: a prehistory of the culture war* and examined how art and culture were weaponised from the 1880s to the 1920s, discussing topics such as white supremacist statues, stolen objects in museums, and the establishment of anthropology and archaeology departments. Hicks connected historical events to contemporary discussions on the so-called 'culture war,' presenting a prehistory of what he terms 'White Fabulation' and its continuation into the 21st century.

This lecture was also part of the *Reclaiming Heritage: The Repatriation of Stolen Cultural Objects in the Post-colonial Era* symposium held on October 28–29, 2024 at The University of Adelaide. The symposium focused on the restitution of cultural objects, with a special emphasis on the Benin Bronzes, and featured various experts discussing best practices and strategies for returning cultural heritage items (see review by Susan Millbank on p. 58 of of this volume). *The Art of Curation* public lecture series has been funded by the School of Humanities, Division of Marketing, and Deputy Vice Chancellor for External Engagement.

CURIO Club: The Society of Curatorial and Heritage Practice

Maeve McNeillage, President

The Society of Curatorial and Heritage Practice, better known as CURIO Club, was formed in late 2024 to enhance social and professional opportunities for students in the Museum and Curatorial Studies program. Since networking is crucial to finding work in the GLAM sector, I was eager to help students better connect with the cohort so that they graduate with a network of industry peers. It is also my hope that alumni remain in contact with the club so that the network continues to expand.

Having personally been uninspired by my experiences with clubs as an undergraduate student, and also having found it difficult to connect with my cohort when taking classes during and post-COVID, it was important to me that the club helped bring people together by doing activities the students are actually interested in. So, my first step was to survey the students with a list of suggested activities to see what received the most interest. This is how the club came to arrange its first ongoing activity: the weekly pub quiz team.


Our pub quiz team at the Stag on East Terrace, team name *It Belongs in a Museum!*, was definitely a highlight of 2024. The group consistently scored in the top 5 teams and even made it to 1st place. The quiz team was a great chance to get to know classmates, build camaraderie, and absorb the wisdom of those already in their second year. Many students also brought their partners and roommates which was another opportunity to meet different people and get to know each other better. It is a lot of fun and is a tradition which will definitely continue in 2025!

Setting up CURIO Club's WhatsApp Community was another great thing to come out of 2024. The community provides members with a convenient platform to ask questions, share industry news, stay informed about club activities, and be notified of job opportunities.

The Art of Curation Lecture Series
White Fabulation: a prehistory of the 'culture war' by Prof. Dan Hicks


Hosted by the Curatorial and Museum Studies Program

Monday 28 October 2024
The Braggs Lecture Theatre, University of Adelaide
5:30 PM arrive for 6:00 PM start



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The Art of Curation Lecture Series media, featuring Dan Hicks' White Fabulation.
Image: courtesy The University of Adelaide

The WhatsApp is a more natural forum than the Discussion Boards on the course Canvas pages and has already proven to be a regularly used resource.

Most of the club's first 6 months required clearing tedious bureaucratic hurdles. So, with that finally out of the way, 2025 is the year that we can organise more ambitious club activities. One such opportunity is a collaboration with ForestrySA to co-design their 150th Anniversary Exhibition. This project promises to be an invaluable professional development experience for students eager to get practical experience in curation, exhibition design, and audience engagement. With many students missing out on taking the course titled *The Exhibition: Concept, Design and Delivery* (see article on p. 08 of this volume) due to its timing, I am really happy that students can still develop those skills thanks to the club.

Another exciting collaboration was with the Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) Young Professionals Network. CURIO Club in collaboration with (AMaGA) Young Professionals Network hosted a networking event in the form of an exhibition scavenger hunt – an opportunity for students to meet industry professionals in a fun and informal setting (see The GLAMAZING RACE on p. 70 of this volume).

Please get involved so you can make the most of these opportunities and stay in the loop about everything else coming up. The annual membership is only \$10 and this money goes directly into creating these experiences which you would not have access to otherwise. As the inaugural President of the club, with the invaluable help of Treasurer Grace Turpin and Secretary Rebekah Morgan, I am proud of what the CURIO Club was able to achieve in its first few months and I am looking forward to all that's to come in 2025.

<https://youx.org.au/interests/clubs/join/8737/>

The GLAMAZING RACE: CURIO Club with AMaGA Emerging Professionals

Rebekah Morgan, Secretary

Having four museums within walking distance of each other on North Terrace has many benefits, one of which is that it's a prime spot for hosting a museum scavenger hunt.

The calling of the Federal election on the same day (3 May 2025) didn't deter our participants who were allocated into three teams (Blue, Green and Pink), visiting the Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA), the South Australian Museum (SAM), the Centre of Democracy, and the Migration Museum. Styled after the reality TV show *The Amazing Race*, teams were given sets of questions at each institution. When all were answered correctly, they were given the questions for the next institution – finishing when they had visited all four locations. The answer to the final question directed them to the networking event. With only an hour and twenty minutes to complete the race, our Blue, Green and Pink teams had no time to waste and sped off from the starting line.

Questions included anagrams, incomplete images of objects for which teams had to find the source object, and general questions - such as "What makes the Opalised Plesiosaur found in the South Australian Museum so unique?" (Answer below). Teams Blue and Pink spent the race neck and neck with the result coming down to the final question, and it was Team Pink who came out on top. Despite the limited time, all teams did a fantastic job! Team Green finished last, but were all smiles at the networking event, with one member saying the string installation *Absence Embodied* by Chiharu Shiota at AGSA was his favourite installation/object of the day. Go and have a look at the work in Gallery 14 in the Melrose wing and be (gl)amazed!

Answer: It is the finest known opalised skeleton on earth!



The GLAMAZING RACE event, left to right: Emma Haddy, Maeve McNeillage, Rebekah Morgan, Grace Turpin, Ingrid Goetz.
Image: courtesy Vanessa Crouch



The GLAMAZING RACE media.
Image: courtesy CURIO Club

What's ON

Art Gallery of South Australia

Dangerously Modern: Australian women artists in Europe 1890-1940

24 May – 7 September 2025

TICKETED exhibition

More than 200 works exploring colour, light, form and movement. Rediscovering female artists from modern art movements such as realism, impressionism, post-impressionism, cubism and abstraction.

<https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/whats-on/exhibitions/dangerously-modern-australian-women-artists-in-europe-1890-1940/>

Ramsay Art Prize

31 May – 31 August 2025

FREE exhibition

Supporting contemporary Australian artists under 40 to create works of art at any scale and in any media.

<https://www.agsa.sa.gov.au/whats-on/exhibitions/ramsay-art-prize-2025/>

Carrick Hill

Morris & Co. An Adelaide Obsession

26 March – 29 June 2025

TICKETED exhibition

Celebrating the artistry, skill and enthusiasm of the Barr Smith family women, this exhibition explores the intimate nature of Morris & Co in the home.

<https://www.carrickhill.sa.gov.au/events/morris-co-at-carrick-hill>

Morris & Co. Lecture Series

14 May, 11 June & 18 June 2025

TICKETED lecture

Hear the insights of decorative arts specialists and curators exploring the importance of Morris' work.

<https://www.carrickhill.sa.gov.au/events/morris-co-at-carrick-hill>

David Roche Gallery

Dancer: A National Portrait Gallery touring exhibition

7 June – 16 August 2025

TICKETED exhibition

Celebrate dance and dancers through movement, self-expression and connection from the lounge room to the stage.

<https://www.rochegallery.com.au/exhibitions/>

History Trust of South Australia

South Australia's History Festival

1 May – 31 May 2025

VARIOUS events & exhibitions

Celebrate, mourn and commemorate the decisions that made us, and the significant sites where South Australian history takes shape.

<https://festival.history.sa.gov.au>

Aussies! The Migration Museum Banners Project

until 31 December 2025

FREE exhibition

First exhibited in 1986 the Banners represented the majority of the almost 50 nationalities in the state. Featuring all participating cultural groups who associated with the project.

<https://migration.history.sa.gov.au/events/aussies-the-migration-museum-banners-project/>

MOD.

Forever

14 January – 21 November 2025

FREE exhibition

Pushing the boundaries of what a museum can be through future-focused topics, immersive and interactive gallery spaces. Forever, focuses on the concepts of time, memory, and life after death.

<https://mod.org.au/exhibitions/forever/>

Forever Party

16 May 2025 – 6pm-9pm

FREE event

MOD's annual exhibition party in the galleries after dark with music, food, drinks, free photobooth and free palm readings. Register for free tickets:

<https://mod.org.au/events/forever-party/>

Ethos: AI: when chatbots play doctor

22 May 2025 – 6pm-7.30pm

FREE forum

Explore people's attitudes to the developing field of AI as part of an interactive forum questioning the ethical use of AI and how it could shape our future. Register for free tickets:

<https://mod.org.au/events/ethos-when-chatbots-play-doctor/>

Samstag Museum of Art

Direct, Directed, Directly

28 February – 30 May 2025

FREE exhibition

Australian and international artists working across performance, moving image, installation and sound, into the gap between what is said and what is heard.

<https://www.unisa.edu.au/connect/samstag-museum/exhibitions/2025/direct-directed-directly/>

Frank Bauer

20 June – 26 September 2025

FREE exhibition

Focussing on the sculptural nature of Bauer's practice, this major exhibition of metal and light considers matters of movement, longevity, repetition and change.

<https://www.unisa.edu.au/connect/samstag-museum/exhibitions/2025/frank-bauer/>

North Terrace: worlds in relief

20 June – 26 September 2025

FREE exhibition

Invoking histories of sculpture, moving image and design, the exhibition draws on the collection of the University of South Australia's Architecture Museum.

<https://www.unisa.edu.au/connect/samstag-museum/exhibitions/2025/north-terrace/>

South Australian Museum

Treasures of the Viking Age: The Galloway Hoard

8 February – 27 July 2025

TICKETED exhibition

Features exotic curiosities and reveals more about the Viking Age in Britain. SA Museum in collaboration with National Museums Scotland.

<https://whatson.samuseum.sa.gov.au/treasures-of-the-viking-age>

State Library of South Australia

Rear Vision: The Holden Collection

28 February – 22 June 2025

FREE exhibition

This exhibition explores the iconic car maker's operations, workforce dynamics, technological innovations, and impact on the national psyche.

<https://stories.slsa.sa.gov.au/the-holden-collection/index.html>

The untold story of the first Holden utilities

21 May 2025

FREE talk

Holden enthusiast and historian Don Loffler reveals the German background to the design of the utilities. Register for free tickets:

<https://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/events/untold-story-of-first-holden-utilities>

Skeletons in the Closet: Finding secrets in family history

28 May 2025

FREE panel discussion

When embarking on the journey of family history, it's important to expect the unexpected. Join a panel of family historians from Genealogy SA as they discuss the secrets that they have uncovered in their family history research. Register for free tickets:

<https://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/events/skeletons-closet>

Keeping House:

The Role of House Museums in Bridging Domestic Heritage and Museological Practice in Australia.

Lauren Elizabeth Wallis

University of Adelaide

Doctor of Philosophy - Ph.D in Arts, 2025

Key Words: Historical House Museums, Domestic History, Museological Studies, Heritage Preservation, Private Residences, Public Exhibits.

This research explores how house museums reflect historical narratives and museological practices, using Carrick Hill and The Cedars in South Australia, as well as Rippon Lea Estate in Victoria. Through a qualitative analysis, the study will investigate how curatorial decisions shape the interpretation of domestic history while balancing museum methodologies. The research will focus on how house museums serve as cultural and historical artifacts, reflecting the values and stories of their time, whilst also engaging modern audiences through various exhibition techniques. By examining these intersections, the project aims to highlight the unique role of house museums in preserving and presenting history.

“When a historic house is transformed into a museum, its role shifts from a private domestic space to one that reflects the ideas and values of those who establish it as a museum” (Orr 2011).

Originating in the 19th century, house museums reflect the rise of historical consciousness and the desire to protect culturally significant homes (Young 2007). Carrick Hill, The Cedars, and Rippon Lea Estate preserve artistic and cultural heritage through their collections of art, furniture, and manicured gardens that reflect the tastes and interests of their former owners. Each house tells a specific story about the people who lived there and the broader historical context they inhabited (Vagnon & Ryan 2016): Carrick Hill of the Hayward family; The Cedars of Hans Heysen and his family, and Rippon Lea of Frederick Sargood. These museums not only serve as historical artifacts but also operate within museological frameworks, using curatorial techniques to engage audiences (Smith 2015). As culturally and historically significant landmarks, all properties engage visitors through guided tours, exhibitions, and events that highlight their architecture, social history, and contributions to the arts.

This research aims to analyse the differing approaches to preservation, interpretation, and engagement with the public, with a focus on how the case study museums balance historical authenticity and contemporary museological practices. The significance of this interdisciplinary project lies in bridging the gap between historical authenticity and contemporary museological practices in three case study museums. The research has three main objectives: to analyse how house museums interpret and preserve domestic history, using case studies from Carrick Hill, The Cedars, and Rippon Lea Estate; to examine the curatorial practices employed in these house museums and

how they balance historical accuracy with visitor engagement; and to provide recommendations for improving the interpretation, preservation, and visitor engagement strategies of house museums in Australia based on the findings from the case studies.

The research is expected to yield several key outcomes. First, it will provide a deeper understanding of how house museums interpret and preserve domestic history, particularly in the Australian context. By analysing the selected case studies, the project will highlight the curatorial decisions that shape historical narratives within these spaces. Additionally, the study will reveal the challenges and strategies house museums face in balancing historical accuracy with visitor engagement. Finally, the research will lead to practical recommendations for enhancing the interpretation and presentation of domestic heritage in house museums, potentially guiding future curatorial practices and improving public engagement. These insights will contribute to both academic discourse and the practical management of heritage sites through a series of conference talks and public presentations, practical recommendations and journal articles.

This research is grounded in an interdisciplinary framework, combining historical theory and museum studies. From a historical perspective, it engages with concepts of historical memory and heritage preservation, examining how house museums act as sites of cultural memory (Pierre1989). It explores the role of domestic spaces in reconstructing and narrating the past, focusing on issues of authenticity, interpretation, and the use of material culture in

shaping historical narratives. In museum studies, the research draws on theories of curatorship and visitor engagement (Falk & Dierking 1992), emphasising the relationship between objects, space, and audience. Interpretive museology is a key concept, analysing how meaning is constructed through curatorial choices and how visitors understand domestic heritage. A qualitative methodology will be employed, primarily using case study analysis of three Australian house museums in SA and VIC. Document analysis of archival records and exhibitions, along with semi-structured interviews with curators, will uncover interpretive strategies. Visitor surveys may also assess public interaction. Triangulating these methods will provide comprehensive insights and inform practical recommendations.

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Abstracts

OF MASTER THESES

The Doomsday Vault Game:

An Analysis of the Colonial Reckoning in Public Programmes and an Educational Programme Proposal in the Curatorial Context of The Museum of Economic Botany.

Andrea Carolina Moron Girado
University of Adelaide
Master of Curatorial and Museum Studies, 2024

Key Words: colonial museums, public programmes, decolonisation, botanic gardens, Economic Botany, Live Action Role-Playing games (LARP).

In The Order of Things (1966), Michel Foucault postulates that every epoch is shaped by the prevailing discourse of truth that informs the systems of power under which individuals live their lives. Foucault calls these discursive systems ‘episteme’. According to his theory, the episteme of the Classical Era (1650-1800) is defined by representation, order and differentiation, which were concepts that resonated in the creation of botanic gardens in the territories claimed by the British Empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These gardens served as museums of living matter for experimentation with crops, evaluation of their profitability for the Empire's economy, and their dissemination. This was made possible by the consolidation of the natural sciences as an episteme.

It may seem that botanic gardens have no place in colonial representation, but the reality is that they were the epitome of imperial exploits and, to this day, are preserved as a reminder of the steps humanity has taken in its quest to understand the world around it, tame it and use it to its advantage. However, this recognition of its colonial legacy has remained theoretical, evidencing a gap between what research has demonstrated and what current curatorial practices exhibit. Different is the case in relation to non-botanical colonial collections, which are presented under a decolonial gaze. That is, their curatorial practices reflect an interpretation that seeks to create narratives and experiences for the public

that critically address the provenance of these exhibitions, traversed by the dynamics of extraction and cultural appropriation inherent to Imperialism.

Taking this context as starting point, this research thesis answers the question of how museums with colonial collections address their past and convey it to their visitors through public programmes, with the aim of identifying best curatorial and educational practices to use them in the development of an educational programme proposal for the Museum of Economic Botany (MEB) at the Adelaide Botanic Gardens, which was chosen as the case study because it is the only surviving museum dedicated to Economic Botany in the world and, despite being created during the colonial era with the motive of strengthening the imperial economy, it is a museum that lacks public and educational programmes that acknowledge its historical context.

Through interviews with staff of the Colonial & Santa Clara Museum in Colombia, and the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Belgium, information was collected on three aspects: the representation of the past contained in their collections, their positioning in relation to this legacy, and the pedagogical and thematic strategies used to introduce the visitors to the colonial past. The results of these interviews were then analysed to extract best practices and compare them with the way in which the MEB is currently positioning itself in relation to its colonial legacy. Then, the conclusions were brought into dialogue with the ways in which the South Australian education sector teaches the colonial period in its curriculum. This information was extracted by conducting interviews with Social Sciences teachers and education experts, as well as an analysis of the Australian Curriculum version 9.0.

Finally, the learnings and outcomes were used to propose an educational programme for students aged 14 and 15 years, based on the dynamics of a Live-Action Role Play (LARP) game called The Doomsday Vault Game that serves as a middle point between current decolonial trends in public and educational programmes in museums with a colonial heritage and the curricular needs of the South Australian education sector.

Strategies for conservation of the Terracotta Warriors in the Emperor Qinshihuang’s Mausoleum Site Museum

Di Chen
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Master of Curatorial and Museum Studies, 2024

Key Words: Museum Conservation, Museum, Conservation, Terracotta Warriors, Exhibition, China.

In recent years, as Chinese museums have developed and the number of visitors has increased, the preservation of the Terracotta Warriors in the Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum (EQMSM) has become a concern. Previous research on this museum has primarily focused on data analysis, identifying problems of the museum through evaluating the collected data, but they have yet to offer any solutions or methods to mitigate the issues. This research thesis will focus on the practical methods and technologies of preserving the Terracotta Warriors during exhibitions in order to find how to conserve unearthed Terracotta Warriors in museum exhibitions.

I will use three methodologies—case study, ethnographic study, and comparative study—to investigate five museums. Then, the data will be compared and analysed to summarise the preservation methods currently being used in these museums, evaluate their effectiveness, and discuss the feasibility of applying these methods in the EQMSM. This research hopes to find some methods and technologies to help the EQMSM conserve the Terracotta Warriors during exhibitions and enhance the visitor experience, showing the best Terracotta Warriors for visitors.

Through field observation, investigation and analysis, this thesis found that the EQMSM can use glass with a UV coating as ceilings to prevent damage from UV.

Then, glass facades can be used to separate visitors from the Terracotta Warriors, allowing visitors to observe the figures up close without causing harm to them. Next, the EQMSM should use artificial lights to brighten the Terracotta Warriors.

Finally, the museum needs to offer each terracotta figure a barcode for subsequent inspection and maintenance and establish interconnected pathways among the three pit galleries to strengthen their connection. These new methods can be further adjusted based on the actual conditions of the museum to achieve better results.

Disturbing Foundations:

Exploring how truth telling through exhibition can reframe colonial legacies in Australian universities.

Jaquie Hagan
University of Adelaide
Master of Curatorial and Museum Studies, 2025

Key Words: truth telling, exhibition, memorialise, founding fathers, colonial philanthropy, decolonise, Australian institutions, University of Adelaide

While there is a historical and contemporary practice of celebrating founding fathers and their revered philanthropy within universities, there is a less visible and much quieter approach, if any, to truth telling about the contested colonial histories of such founding fathers. Exploring truth telling through the engaging visual interface of an exhibition while examining the outcome of how the student body audience perceive the narrative both pre and post exhibition, may offer incentive to universities to further embrace this content as part of their identity in addition to motivating institutional acknowledgement, remediation and Indigenous representation alongside colonial legacies.

This body of work will examine the level of acknowledgment of colonial pasts embedded within the University of Adelaide and the true cost of their founding fathers’ accumulation of wealth and philanthropic contributions that led to the founding of the University. Wealth which was often acquired from pastoral and mining ventures operated on unceded Indigenous land resulting in the displacement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. This research will form the basis for the curatorial narrative of an exhibition titled *Disturbing Foundations: prosperity, philanthropy & provenance - The University of Adelaide and its founding fathers*.

Engaging in the curation of the exhibition, I will endeavour to reframe how these legacies are told, using an interpretivistic research philosophy which will underpin a qualitative case study research design to answer the question, “Can truth telling practices in an exhibition setting change perceptions of celebrated university founding fathers and encourage institutional decolonisation?”

Institutional founding fathers are often glorified and the reverberations of their colonial acquired philanthropy resonate in the physical and academic environment, evident in the naming practices of buildings, monuments, chairs and scholarly awards. As such these revered historical figures are deeply rooted in the origin stories of Australian institutions and are often celebrated through ‘selective’ narratives. Such narratives within the University of Adelaide will be observed and more broadly, projects to decolonise universities will be explored. There has been a growing movement internationally associated with decolonising institutions following the *#RhodesMustFall* movement of 2015 at the University of Cape Town leading to further activity at Universities globally. In addition, the University of Melbourne is currently engaged in a large scale Indigenous led project facilitated by Dr Ross Jones, Dr James Wagnorne, and Professor Marcia Langton, titled *Indigenous history of the University of Melbourne project*.

Through this research and curatorial engagement, the aim is to foster awareness within the student body of uncomfortable colonial narratives associated with the establishment of the University of Adelaide, exposing the source of the founding fathers’ philanthropy and association with Indigenous dispossession. In addition and most importantly, endeavour to encourage institutional accountability and enlightenment from what has been a convenient period of comfortable amnesia.

Non-Linear Soundscapes:

Enhancing the Ideation and Planning of Audio Within Museums and Galleries Using Strategies and Practices from the Video Game Industry.

John Bowman Craig
University of Adelaide
Master of Curatorial and Museum Studies, 2024

This thesis encompasses a review of academic and industry content related to video game audio design and implementation, cataloguing the objectives, challenges, and methods utilised, while identifying key areas of overlap and synthesis in the design and production of audio for museums, including methods of addressing shared challenges, and improving the communication of ideas to external contractors.

While sound is increasingly being recognised as a powerful tool in museum and gallery experiences, its integration into interpretive exhibition design often remains troubled, with museum professionals stating that considerations around audio implementation within exhibitions come late in the planning and design process. Some of this can be attributed to lingering notions of the 'silent museum', however, the recent development of the global 'experience economy' has proven that museums are willing to engage with non-traditional methods of presentation not only to increase visitor draw, but also to better relate their object and collection narratives to an

audience that has experience and familiarity with interactive media. Nevertheless, effective ideation and planning of audio elements requires a degree of technical knowledge and familiarity with audio concepts, further complicated by the non-visual nature of the medium and the non-linear nature of museum and gallery spaces.

This nonlinearity is an attribute shared by video games, which are by nature self-directed experiences. Current academic discourse on the intersection of video games and museums pays significant interest toward integrating the modes of interaction, visual elements, and technologies developed within the video game industry into cultural contexts. Less attention has been paid, however, to the investigation of the ways in which audio functions and is implemented in video games, and how strategies and practices from the development of video game audio might be applicable within a museum context.

Through a comparative analysis of museum and video game sound design practices, this research identifies several concepts and methods that are relevant not only to the practical elements of non-linear sound design, but also to the communication of audio concepts. Through connecting this research with my professional experiences as a sound designer for museums, I have developed a basic toolset for planning and ideating sound design, which is presented in the final chapter of this thesis. I propose that this toolset can assist museum professionals during the interpretive curatorial process in the design of cohesive and immersive exhibition experiences.

Neurodiversity and Museums:

A case study on interactivity and sensory needs in Adelaide and Hong Kong, discussing whether the interactivity and related arrangements of museum exhibits meet the needs of sensory needs visitors.

Ka Yin Mak
University of Adelaide
Master of Curatorial and Museum Studies, 2024

Key Words: Neurodiversity, Sensory needs, Interactiveness, Accessibility, Adelaide Museums, Hong Kong Museums

Museums are places where the public can experience and learn from exhibitions, including neurotypical and neurodivergent visitors. This thesis discusses the importance of interactive elements in exhibitions for promoting learning and how museums can support visitors with sensory needs.

This thesis uses five museums in Adelaide and Hong Kong as case studies to discuss whether the interactive elements of their exhibits meet the needs of visitors with sensory needs. The five museums are The South Australian Museum (Biodiversity Gallery), MOD. (BROKEN), Australian Space Discovery Centre (Space Gallery), M+ (I.M. Pei Architecture exhibition), and Hong Kong Science Museum (Children’s Gallery).

The research method is qualitative research, using field observation methods to document the exhibits, take photos and videos, and analyse the interactiveness and accessibility of exhibitions. From this study, museums are addressing neurodivergent visitors' needs through sensory night arrangements, thoughtful pre-visit guides, and interactive exhibits. These designs attract visitors of different ages and cater to sensory needs.

However, improvements are needed. (1) Preview exhibitions should include content like sensory maps, pre-visit guides, and social stories. (2) Pre-visit guides should be concise, socially engaging and use bright colours. (3) Exhibitions should strengthen interactive elements and multi-sensory experiences. Interactive exhibits should be meaningful and related to the theme. (4) Sensory nights should also consider online registration to manage crowds and maintain a clear exhibition theme.

Freakshow Sensationalism in the Museum:

Depictions of Disabled Bodies in Anatomical Museum Collections.

Kansas Bird
University of Adelaide
Master of Curatorial and Museum Studies, 2024

Key Words: disability, museology, human remains, freakshow, queer theory, death studies

This thesis argues that the portrayal of the human remains of disabled people in museums has been directly influenced by ‘freakshow’ exhibitions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The public is more often familiar with ‘freakshows’ from the United States, largely due to the impact that showmen like P.T. Barnum had on the circus industry. However, this thesis discusses institutions which are largely contained to the United Kingdom and parts of Europe.

While the practise of displaying disabled bodies for the purposes of entertainment has more recently been understood by scholars to be dehumanising and inaccurate in their medical diagnoses, the methods of displaying human remains in museums have remained largely unchanged since the nineteenth century. This is especially true in museums which were established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Institutions which continue outdated practises of displaying the human remains of disabled individuals - practises which this thesis argues are extremely harmful - often claim that their focus has shifted away from pure spectacle. The justifications for displaying the human remains of disabled individuals now focus on the scientific importance of studying disability and educating visitors on the medical realities of disability. Inclusion of modern critical theories of disability and non-normativity is still rare however. Furthermore, this thesis discusses the comparability in efforts to repatriate the bodies of disabled individuals to that of the bodies of People of Colour, which have also historically been held in museums under dubious circumstances.

These issues are discussed in this thesis through the analysis of four case-studies, individuals who during their lives were exhibited for their disabilities, and then continued to be displayed in museums after their deaths.

The case-studies selected are Julia Pastrana, Charles Byrne, Caroline Crachami, and the Two-Headed Boy of Bengal (referred to in this thesis as the ‘Bengali Boy’). This thesis then analyses the similarities in how these individuals were depicted in museums and ‘freakshows’ and discusses the implications that this research has for museological study. A key aspect of this thesis is also the manner in which these case-studies are discussed. Significant care is given to ensuring that derogatory, offensive, or inaccurate language is avoided except in situations where the discussion of such language is necessary to the thesis topic. In these cases, derogatory, offensive, or inaccurate language is regarded as such and is clarified to not be generally appropriate when discussing the people or diagnoses which are covered in this thesis.

This thesis discusses the ways in which both ‘freakshows’ and museums have dehumanised disabled bodies, with a specific focus on using respectful language when discussing disabled individuals. This is done through utilising discussion of the social model of disability to place disabled people as experts in their representation and owners of their own bodies. Queer theory is also utilised to aid in discussing ‘disabled bodies’, a term used to describe bodies which are made non-normative by virtue of their owners being disabled. This is done much in the same way that the term ‘queer bodies’ is used to describe bodies which are ascribed non-normativity due to their queerness. These theories are utilised so as to acknowledge the humanity of disabled individuals in a way which is unfortunately still rare in academic scholarship today.

**Fakes, Forgeries, and the Unknown:
Problematic Artefacts and What to Do with Them.**

Katerina Anna Frangos
University of Adelaide
Master of Curatorial and Museum Studies, 2024

Museums face increasing challenges in managing fake, forged, and unprovenanced archaeological artefacts in their collections. These objects present significant challenges such as reputational risks, strained donor relationships, and unmet visitor expectations.

However, they also present unique opportunities for deeper engagement, revealing complex biographies of forgery, collecting practices, and the antiquities market. This thesis explores best practices for exhibiting problematic artefacts, emphasizing their multifaceted histories and potential to deepen public understanding of cultural and institutional narratives.

A comprehensive literature review examines the illicit antiquities market, the creation of forgeries, and factors influencing the acquisition of fake and unprovenanced objects. These include traditional collecting practices such as the Grand Tour and displays of wealth by aristocrats who became wealthy benefactors to museums, thereby shaping institutional collecting networks and methods. The review also clarifies the distinction between fakes and forgeries which is key to understanding how such artefacts should be treated and displayed. Fakes encompass replicas, copies, and pastiches, which are sold as legitimate, unprovenanced objects or misrepresented as authentic, while forgeries are deliberately crafted to deceive for profit. These distinctions underscore the complexities of authenticity in museum collections and the challenges institutions face in managing such objects.

Bridging these theoretical discussions with practical implications, I conducted a case study of four artefacts from the Museum of Classical Archaeology at the University of Adelaide. This case study allowed me to explore the complexities of acquiring and interpreting unprovenanced objects in a museum setting. The selected artefacts include a fake Egyptian funerary cone (MCA 157), an Egyptian mummy shroud (MCA 142), an Etruscan vessel tripod (MCA 713), and a North African lamp (MCA 443). The aim was to provide insights, later discussed in the results, into how institutions can navigate the challenges of interpreting objects with complex provenance histories and biographies.

The museum’s collection, including three of the four artefacts, was largely donated by Arthur Dannatt

(1881–1964), a British antiquities collector who emigrated to Australia in 1901. His collection, acquired by the museum in 1983, was built through personal collecting networks. Due to limited documentation of Dannatt’s acquisition practices, the case study compares these artefacts to similar objects in other institutions and considers cases where no comparable objects exist. This approach broadens the analysis to encompass market dynamics and collecting practices beyond a single collector’s network. Additionally, stylistic and comparative analyses of the artefacts provide valuable insights into their origins and significance, emphasizing the need for transparent narratives that foster critical engagement with authenticity. This also encourages additional biographies of the artefacts' journeys to the Adelaide institute through this investigation, fostering further reflection on their broader historical and cultural contexts.

The thesis concludes with recommendations for best practices in handling and exhibiting fake, forged, and unprovenanced artefacts. These include developing detailed object biographies, creating engaging displays, and utilizing digital tools to enhance accessibility and transparency. I first conducted a review of museum practices in labelling, treatment, and display, particularly in temporary exhibits, catalogues, and online formats, which provided insights into how the case study objects should be treated. This led to my thesis results offering specific recommendations for exhibit design, labelling, and public engagement strategies. The research culminates in proposed physical display cases and a digital record layout for the museum’s artefacts.

By transparently addressing the histories of problematic artefacts, museums, particularly university museums, can transform them into valuable educational resources. These institutions, with their emphasis on visitor interaction and scholarly engagement, are uniquely positioned to challenge traditional notions of authenticity and reshape perceptions of cultural heritage.

Bridging Education and Experience:

Enhancing Secondary Student Engagement at the South Australian Museum through Educational Initiatives.

Lauren Elizabeth Wallis
University of Adelaide
Master of Curatorial and Museum Studies, 2024

Key Words: Museum Education, Education, Engagement, Constructivism, Pedagogy, South Australia

This thesis investigates pedagogical strategies for enhancing South Australian secondary school students' engagement with cultural heritage at the South Australian Museum. Focusing on educational initiatives, the study examines how targeted approaches can foster a deeper connection to cultural heritage amongst teenagers. Museums, as custodians of history and culture, play a pivotal role in education, yet they often face challenges in engaging secondary students who require interactive and meaningful learning experiences. This research addresses these challenges by evaluating the museum's current educational practices, identifying gaps, and proposing strategies informed by educational theory and successful models from other institutions.

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining survey data, interviews, and case studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. The analysis reveals that while the South Australian Museum offers curriculum-linked resources, such as gallery worksheets and discovery cases for schools to borrow, these resources are outdated or underutilised. Notably, no high schools have engaged with the museum's "Discovery Cases", highlighting a disconnect between the museum's offerings and the needs of secondary educators. Teachers and education professionals consulted in the study, advocated for the inclusion of dedicated education assistants to lead school group activities and facilitate connections between the museum's exhibits and the school curriculum.

Similarly, a significant finding of this research is the value of pre- and post-visit interactions between museum educators and schools. These interactions provide opportunities to align museum experiences with classroom learning, creating a cohesive educational journey. Drawing inspiration from the Art Gallery of South Australia, which successfully integrates interactive and curriculum-relevant programming, the thesis explores how similar approaches could be adapted for the South Australian Museum. Hands-on learning, collaborative curriculum design, and more immersive exhibition experiences are identified as key elements that can make the museum more relevant and engaging for secondary students.

The research also delves into broader theoretical implications, considering how museums balance their roles as cultural institutions and educational spaces. It argues that museums must move beyond the static to embrace pedagogical strategies that encourage active participation and critical thinking. By doing so, they can cater to the learning preferences of teenagers, who are often drawn to interactive and experiential methods of engagement.

Ultimately, this thesis provides a framework for the South Australian Museum to strengthen its educational initiatives and better serve secondary school students. It offers practical recommendations over a nine year plan, including updating curriculum resources, integrating education assistants, and fostering long-term school-museum partnerships. By addressing these gaps, the museum has the potential to transform its educational offerings, enriching students' understanding of South Australian cultural heritage and ensuring that it remains a vital resource for future generations. This research contributes to the broader discourse on museum education, emphasising the importance of aligning institutional practices with the needs of contemporary learners. In doing so, it underscores the museum's role not only as a repository of history but also as a dynamic space for learning, reflection, and cultural connection.



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Society of Curatorial and Heritage Practice

The University of Adelaide

<https://able.adelaide.edu.au/humanities/research/curio-adelaide-journal-of-curatorial-and-heritage-practice>

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