

MCPP the year in review: start...pause...wait...adapt...continue!

The year started with high expectations, Melbourne was emerging from its slumber, and there was optimism that the disruptions of the previous year were a distant memory....

Planning for projects commenced, and there was strong demand for Program places. However, just as semester one projects were being assigned, along came the first 'short' disruption. A longer disruption followed, and restrictions were extended. Projects that required campus access had starts 'temporarily' postponed. Other projects that had already commenced were paused. Alas, what we originally thought would be a brief disruption continued. After some initial wishful thinking to wait just a little longer, it was soon decided the Program would not stop but be delivered remotely! Building on lessons learnt from 2020, we were confident the Program would again be a valuable and welcome addition to the virtual space. While access to the collections is preferable, it is not essential – students can complete internships and develop professional skills remotely, and the MCPP would continue to enhance the student experience and offer connectivity to the campus.



MuSE! Program virtual 'coffee catchup' held via Zoom in October

The experiences of students assigned projects this year differed depending on timings. For those students placed early in the year, their projects started on campus and proceeded with only minor disturbance. Other students, that started slightly later, completed only introductory sessions when the restrictions came into force, and so had to wait. Fortunately, some of these projects could be adapted and work remotely without the planned access to collections. There were also projects with planned start dates that were repeatedly postponed each time an expected return to campus was delayed. In this challenging landscape, collections staff deftly developed new projects so they could continue to support students on virtual placements. Through all of this, I admired the enthusiasm and dedication of the students to their projects - or in some cases the promise of working on their projects! Ongoing dialogue between students and staff ensured connections were maintained, and the isolation of lockdown was kept at bay. Further, the launch of the **MuSE!** (Museums, Students Extras) **Program** proved timely and a highlight for many.

There have been many gains this year. In addition to the impressive achievements of individual projects, the camaraderie between participants and collections staff demonstrated generosity and flexibility. Yes, it has been a year of postponements, where much time was spent postponing and then reimagining events. However, the ongoing goodwill has shown that even when projects and events did not happen quite as planned, they were nonetheless a worthwhile pursuit.

The projects

This year's projects engaged with a broad selection of collections and covered areas from exhibition and interpretation through to conservation, cataloguing and public programs. Following is a summary of Program participants and their projects.

During her internship at the **Medical History Museum**, **Jei Huai-Yun Liu** (MA Art Curatorship) had the opportunity to develop cataloguing and research skills to help prepare for future employment. Also at the Museum, **Tanya Kovacevic** (Bachelor of Biomedicine), was assigned an exhibition research project that explored key people in the history of the Royal Children's Hospital with a focus on pivotal women. Tanya found the project inspiring, as it gave her an insight into the challenges faced by women interested in medicine when the discipline was in its infancy.

Hilary Kwan (MA Cultural Materials Conservation) was assigned a cataloguing project with the collections at the **Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum**, where she gained experience with *Vernon* (the museum's database). Hilary added information on previous exhibitions, related people, and object types to the database, as well as assisting with various cataloguing projects.

Larika Desai, (MA Urban Heritage) and **Allegra McCormack**, (BA Politics and History) discovered the fascinating history of the **International House Collection** through an exploration of '50 years of women at IH'. Completing an internship, Larika investigated this theme through an architectural lens, while Allegra consulted the archival materials to generate biographies of key women to be highlighted on the IH website.

At the **Baillieu Library Print Collection**, **Yueheng (Viola) Lyu** (MA Art Curatorship), completed an internship and investigated print-making techniques for an upcoming on-line exhibition. **Mia Palmer-Verevis** (MA in Art Curatorship), also contributed to this exhibition research project. **Jacey Quah's** (BA History) and **Christina Olszewski's**, (MA Art Curatorship) curatorial project involved researching for *Circa 1520*, an upcoming on-line exhibition which will explore a time of profound cultural and social change through prints, drawings, books and maps drawn from the UoM's Special Collections.

Cody Alexander (MA Cultural Materials Conservation) had the opportunity to work with the **Rare Maps in Special Collections**. Her research project examined the different facets of the collection to gain a better understanding of its history, and to provide context for interpreting its significance. Cody enjoyed being able to delve into the maps, and was especially interested in how research can facilitate better discovery of the collections. **Alina Evans** (Grad. Cert. Art History) also placed on a curatorial research project within **Special Collections**, contributed content to *Dante 700* – an exhibition marking the 700 year anniversary since the poet's death, that will showcase related materials.

The **Architecture Building and Planning Library's Rare Materials Collection** had excellent projects for students that unfortunately were delayed due to lockdowns. **Sophie Antulov** (MA Cultural Materials Conservation) and **Jessica Hayoung You** (MA Art Curatorship) were ready to start a discovery and listing project with the Cross Section Collection (4000 photographs, negatives, correspondence and papers related to the architectural newsletter), when campus access restrictions came in. After several false starts, they are both looking forward to finally commencing their project in early January! Similarly, Masters in Cultural Materials Conservation students **Samantha Rogers** and **Yuhong Zhang** had their projects placed on temporary hold. Samantha had a brief introduction to her provenance project with the Rare Books Collection, while Yuhong had started work on the Parkes Postcard Collection cataloguing project when the projects ground to a halt.

Three students, **Chen Shi** (MA Arts and Cultural Management), **Angela Qin** (Bachelor of Science) and **Chufan Zhang** (MA of Cultural Materials Conservation), completed placements with the **East Asian Collection** in coordination with **Arts West**. Working in consultation with collections and academic staff, this project involved curating displays of two Chinese scrolls in the Arts West building.

The **Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology collections** provided some fascinating projects keenly sought by students from varied disciplines. **Chang Shen** (BSc Computing and Software Systems) and **Yi Chen** (MA Information Systems) worked on cataloguing and display projects which included showcasing FEIT Faculty staff research in the new Melbourne Connect building. **Ronelle Coetzer's** (MA Art Curatorship) research project focused on the Bennett photo album which features Engineering students and student life between 1900 - 1902. **Alexandra Vamvas** (MA Cultural Materials Conservation) worked with the photogrammetry collection of glass plates, old files and plans. Alex transferred the materials into archival file folders, labelled and sorted into categories (ie. Indigenous sites by state, heritage projects by state), and matched these with accompanying negatives. She also assisted in reviewing and identifying old student photogrammetry projects related to Indigenous materials that will require

consultation with relevant communities. Lastly, **Yuji (Sunny) Zou's** (BA Art History, Politics and International Studies) documentation project focussed on a collection of 500 photographs taken by Paul Mosig that capture Engineering student campus life in the 1960s. The project will raise awareness of this remarkable collection and aid in its future interpretation.

Placed on the Digital Presence project within **Archives and Special Collections**, **Heidi Sin Man Tang** (MA Arts and Cultural Management), gained practical experience and extended her knowledge of audience engagement. Heidi researched significant dates, analysed social media content, and contributed to creative projects that explored social media collaboration and boosting student interaction on Instagram. Heidi commented her project increased her professional skills and knowledge of ASC and she gained a greater understanding of the field of archives and special collections.



MA Art Curatorship student Ronelle Coetzer researching the stories within the Bennett Album.

At the **Harry Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology**, Doctor of Medicine students **Honey Baseri**, **Andrew Ng**, **Je (Albert) Min Suh** and Bachelor of Science (Physiology) student **Rachel Thomson** were ready to commence a cataloguing and documentation project of the Pathology collections when the lockdown hit. The project was placed on hold, and unfortunately due to the ongoing restrictions was unable to restart. Other projects at the HBA did manage to go ahead due to their ability to be worked on remotely. MA Cultural Materials Conservation students **Isabelle Legg's** and **Jessica Argall's** research project centred on Comparative Anatomy Collection specimens related to the McCoy Society's 1937 expedition to King Island. There was some ambiguity as to how the Museum acquired the collection, and so they sourced, consolidated and examined all available expedition information to solve this mystery. Focused on a different aspect of the Collection, Bachelor of Science students **Jo Lyn Loo** and **Cherry Tang** investigated a box of fossil bones thought to be from the Hairy-nosed wombat, about which little is known. The specimens, believed to be collected by Frederick Wood Jones, were potentially of significant scientific interest as that species of wombat had not been present on the Island for over ten thousand years. Using newspaper archives they made some excellent discoveries, and once back on campus hope to confirm the scattered fossils are indeed from a Hairy-nosed wombat. Also at the HBA Museum, Bachelor of Biomedicine student **Sharanya Bhaskaran** and MA Cultural Materials Conservation student **Jillian Colrain**, researched a pair of fossilised jawbones identified as Procoptodon – an extinct giant short-faced kangaroo that lived in Australia during the Pleistocene epoch. Using accompanying historical documentation and examining old records from the Queensland Museum, they managed to decode the information from a letter and have since been able to confirm the genus of the specimen! Further, they have pieced together how the University acquired these jawbones – a wonderful result.

Belinda Neilson (MA Art Curatorship) commenced her internship with the **Property and Campus Services Photographic Collection** early in the year, and so was able to carry out most of her project on site. Belinda focused on sorting, documenting and rehousing a selection of photographic materials that record the University's built environment of the last 40 years.

At the **Herbarium**, **Mel Simpson** (Grad. Dip. of Urban Horticulture) completed her research project on the historical contributions of H.B. Williamson in describing Victorian flora. Williamson was an amateur botanist and Honorary Keeper of the Herbarium (1929-1931). This content will be curated to provide display materials for an online exhibition.

The ongoing lockdowns have caused repeated delays to the installation of **Philippa Saunders'** (Post-Doc. Researcher, Dept. Microbiology and Immunology) much anticipated exhibition. Utilising objects from the **School of Chemistry Collection**, the exhibition 'Chemistry in Colour' explores the integral role colour plays in chemistry. You will be able to see the themed display on the ground floor of the Chemistry Building.

At the **Victorian College of Arts**, **Isabelle Kane** (MA Arts and Cultural Management) assisted in the digital cataloguing and metadata input for the Digital Film and Television Archive. This project will make the collection more accessible to students, academics, filmmakers, researchers and the wider community.

In the **Art Museums** section of the **Museums & Collections Department** **Yi Li's** (BA Art History) curatorial research project enabled her to gain experience in museum curation. Yi was involved in an upcoming exhibition at Buxton Contemporary, as well as a major survey exhibition planned for next year. Through her placement Yi has had the opportunity to hone her curatorial skills and gain firsthand knowledge in exhibition development.

Sarah Fang-Ning Lin (MA Art Curatorship), and **Flora Harpley-Green** (MA Screenwriting) are curating an exhibition for the Main Dining Room of **University House**. The exhibition, using University House as a focal point, will explore the changing physical landscape of the Parkville campus and consider how the ideals and identity of the post war period were represented within the architecture constructed in the 1950s and 1960s. The exhibition will be installed next year to coincide with the 70th anniversary celebrations of University House.

International Museums and Collections Award

Offered since 2010, the IMAC Award has enabled 18 student recipients from the Universities of Melbourne and Birmingham to travel to the partner university and benefit from a month-long placement immersed in their collections and museums. Award recipients have enjoyed a specially tailored program, and guided by conservators, curators, collection managers and archivists, developed skills across museums and collections while expanding their international professional networks.

Unfortunately, this year due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic on global travel, the IMAC Award was not able to be offered. This hiatus is providing the opportunity for the Award to be refreshed, and we look forward to offering this unique professional development experience as soon as we are able to do so – watch this space!



Aston Webb building on the University of Birmingham campus.

Introducing the MuSE! Program

The **MuSE!** (Museums, Students, Extras) **Program** was launched this year for student participants in the MCPP. The Program was developed with dual objectives – first, to encourage greater connectivity between students by offering informal events and networking opportunities with peers and collections colleagues. Semi-regular events would include 'coffee catchups' and behind the scenes tours of UoM museums and collections. The second objective of the **MuSE! Program** was to aid professional development and provide students with added vocational experiences beyond individual projects. These events would include panel discussions with sector professionals and training sessions in museum skills (object handling and disaster planning etc.) to help facilitate skills development, awareness of cultural sector issues and further networking opportunities. While a year where a substantial proportion was spent in lockdown may not be the best time to launch a campus-based, face to face program, in many ways it proved to be an ideal time.

The planning team of Jason Benjamin (Coordinator Conservation Programs), Chelsea Harris, (Coordinator, Communications and Engagement, ASC) and myself swiftly transformed on campus plans to a virtual Program. In addition to some entertaining virtual 'coffee catch ups', two on-line professional development sessions were held in the second semester. The **Collection Professionals** panel discussions '*A day in the life of a curator, collections manager, conservator*' and '*How did I get here...?*' presented lively panel discussions that explored the varied career paths of UoM's collections experts.

While a considerable number of postponements and rescheduling did define the early months of the **MuSE! Program** (apologies again for all those rain check emails!), once adapted to suit virtual delivery in semester two, it achieved what it had set out to do. Subsequent feedback from participants confirmed they found the Program engaging, helpful to their professional development and created greater connectivity to campus. We are very much looking forward to building on the successes of the **MuSE! Program** in the new year, hopefully with more events on campus this time!



MuSE!

Building skills and connections for students
working with the University's collections.

Student voices, project insights

In the reflections below, students Ronelle Coetzer and Yi Li give insider accounts of their project placements.

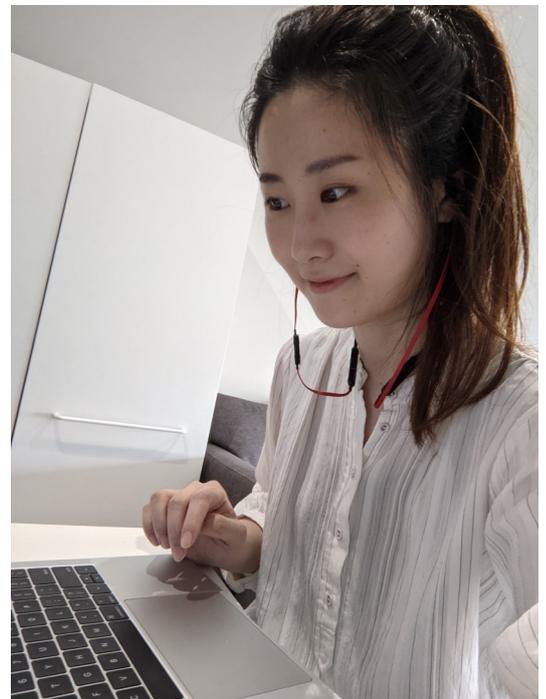
I am a Master of Art Curatorship student and commenced a placement at the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology under the curatorial guidance of Dr Richard Gillespie. The objective was to research the narratives and origins of photos, c 1900-1902, in an album compiled by Athol J Bennett, an engineering student at Melbourne University. The wide variety of subject matter contained in the images provided a glimpse of the life of engineering students, their excursions, with some early photos of the university and technical and structural modernisation in and around Melbourne at that time. The project piqued my interest due to my natural curiosity and interest in history. Being a UoM student, I felt a particular alma mater affinity with this student cohort, wondering what it would have been like 120 years ago being part of a small group of students who would eventually make a significant impact in their respective fields. Researching the stories behind the photos and delving into the twists and turns in the students' lives brought them to life for me. By the end of the project, it felt as if I knew them personally. Digitisation of the photo album had the advantage of allowing most of the work to be done remotely during COVID lockdown; however, the size of the digitised files had its challenges. We also had to overcome issues such as the fragility of some resources and not having access to facilities and libraries in person. The guidance, help and support of Dr Gillespie and the reading room staff were invaluable in this aspect. Academically, the experience improved my research skills, particularly on how to use online resources optimally. The album and the narratives are now in the process of being published on the University Collection website.

Ronelle Coetzer, MA Art Curatorship 2021

My name is Yi Li and I am a student of Bachelor of Arts (Art History). I interned at the Art Museum section of the Museums & Collections Dept. supervised by Samantha Comte, the senior curator, who kindly directed me to discover real world museum practices. In this placement, I participated in researching content for an upcoming exhibition at the Buxton Contemporary as well as a major survey exhibition in 2022. Tasks ranged from gathering articles and writing artists' biographies, compiling artworks for loan agreement requests to drafting labels and social media content. To break the physical limits caused by lockdown, I had enhanced my level of resilience and flexibility, by keeping myself updated with information shared on Teams, actively communicating with my host supervisor and attending project meetings with the entire team. Working remotely from home also forced me to always take the initiative, have a detail-oriented mind and think independently and logically in accordance with the purpose of final materials.

The experience allows me to understand the practical process of implementing exhibitions and different roles of the project team members such as collection manager, project coordinator and registrar. Importantly, I have learned about constructive curatorial input to project coordination, which involves clarification on the exhibition content, but also a detailed consideration on viewers' experience, artists' requirements and funding during decision-making on display. Prior to lockdown, I had the opportunity to work in Arts West for the 21 x10 project presented by the IPMoA, where I observed the installing process and was equipped with object handling skills. This is a remarkable opportunity to gain industry experience and to explore different roles involved in a real-life art institution, which has broadened my view on future career options.

Yi Li BA (Art History) 2021



Art History student Yi Li researching content for an exhibition.

Year's end

Reflecting on the projects and achievements of the year, it is heartening to see that so much has been accomplished and is possible in challenging times. The importance of taking opportunities when they present, and being adaptable and flexible to make things work, also became more apparent. Through the projects, I look forward to more students discovering the University's outstanding museums and collections, and hopefully with the added bonus of being in the same room with the collections and one another!

Thank you to all who have been involved with and supported the collections projects. Best wishes for the festive season and year ahead.

Helen Arnoldi
Collections Projects Program Coordinator
December 2021