

The year in review: *Close encounters, the value of collections*

Talking with participants in the Museums and Collections Projects Program during the year, I was frequently reminded how the modest act of connecting with a collection object is often a compelling experience. Even in this digitally focussed world that students so easily inhabit, a close encounter with an object can be very meaningful. I recall the first collection items that I catalogued, where the opportunity to explore ‘hidden’ histories was captivating. Looking for inscriptions and markings on the underside of early furniture or trying to decipher a signature on a painting, were influential experiences then that continue to motivate and inspire me in collections work today.

Students seek out project opportunities through this Program because they want to develop professional skills (which they do!), but I think it may be the *close encounters* with the objects that energises and sustains this interest. While it is pleasing to view an exhibition and see artworks and objects in a curated environment, there is another level of engagement gained through direct interaction with cultural materials in a more ‘unplugged’ way. There is something magical in being able to study a print unencumbered by the barrier of a mount and glass, or to browse the shelves in the Rare Books room and look closely at a volume that draws you in. These are some of the experiences afforded to participants in the Program this year. Students and volunteers gained a new understanding of collection items, and were inspired by direct interaction with an object; be it a scientific instrument, botanical model, geological specimen, 16th century print or painted surface. Through this connection there is a twofold benefit: the cultural collections remain a relevant and dynamic resource, and for Program participants, beyond the immediate benefit of skills development, they are treated to close encounters with collections, and these experiences will continue to resonate.

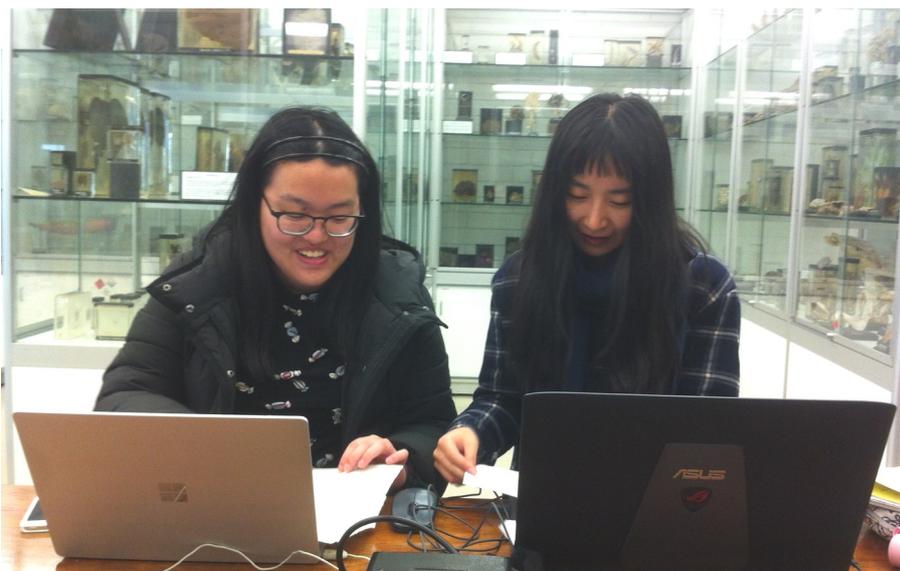
A summary of the projects...

Many different types of collection management and curatorial projects were assigned this year across the University’s museums and collections. Following is an introduction to the Program’s participants and their projects, and while grouped for clarity based on the main task carried out, in reality most of the assignments engaged with several areas of collection management.

This year **preventative conservation projects** proved a popular choice for those keen to develop their skills and have an immediate, positive impact on the longevity of the collections. **Teresa Yang Hu** (Bachelor of Science, UoM) and **Rose Maurice** (MA Cultural Materials Conservation, UoM) worked on a documentation and rehousing project at the Herbarium that enabled them to explore the beautiful botanical specimens of the Walter Zimmer Collection. At the Ed Muirhead Physics Museum, **Helen Merritt** (MA Cultural Materials Conservation, UoM), completed a condition survey report on the Cooke Refractor Telescope c.1874, and the outcomes of this project will help inform its future management. **Jennifer Todd** (MA Cultural Materials Conservation, UoM) has been involved in a preservation and assessment project with the Law Rare Books Collection, where she has focused on the ‘Statutes at large’ legislative collection donated by Sir Redmond Barry.



UoB student Katherine Reeve cleaning geological specimens



Amy and Audrey working on the catalogue in the Tieggs Zoology Museum.

Cataloguing is a foundation area of collection management and under the guidance of collections staff, students had the opportunity to hone their skills. At the Tieggs Zoology Museum, **Amy Wu** (MA Arts and Cultural Management, UoM) and **Audrey Prasetya** (Bachelor of Science, Monash) catalogued a selection of animal specimens. For Amy, learning the taxonomy of the animals and deciphering handwriting in the Museum’s original register have been some of the challenges that she has keenly met. **Christina Kong** (MA Cultural Materials Conservation, UoM) and **Natalie Chiodo** (graduate MA Architecture, UoM) worked on a cataloguing and collection

assessment project with the Architecture, Building and Planning Library’s Rare Materials. Also based in the ABP Library, **Saran Kim** (Bachelor of Design, UoM) and **Katrina Watson** (MA Cultural Materials Conservation, UoM) have been involved with a cataloguing and preservation assessment project with the Parkes Postcard Collection which comprises thousands of black and white postcards of European architecture. Based at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, **Natasha Ressia** (Bachelor of Arts, UoM) catalogued a collection of indigenous stone tools and artefacts and added them to the Museum’s database, *EMu*.

Alison Cowen's (volunteer) project with the Herbarium's Botanical Model Collection had her updating and expanding the catalogue. The early 20th century models, made of painted papier-mâché, wood and other materials and produced in France and Germany, were used for teaching and illustrative purposes within the School of Botany. **Natalie Ford** (Bachelor of Arts, UoM) has recently commenced a cataloguing project with the Creswick Campus Historical Collection which includes objects, documents and photographs that relate to 100 years of forestry education. At the Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum, **Sigourney Jacks** (MA Art Curatorship, UoM) catalogued dental objects and enjoyed learning collections skills through the lens of dental history. **Emily Hornsby** (MA Cultural Heritage, Deakin) recently commenced a project at the Medical History Museum where she will be cataloguing a collection that includes surgical tools, splints and documents.



Creswick exhibition curator Tahney Fosdike on location.

There were some fascinating **research and interpretation projects** this year which contributed to the collections remaining a dynamic resource for the University community and beyond. These projects provided participants with the opportunity to 'dig deeper' and discover new information and insights into the collections. **Jessica Majcen** (PhD Art History, UoM) and **Jaxon Waterhouse** (BA Honours, UoM) participated in the 'Book Detective' project with the Rare Books Collection. Through their placements they had the opportunity to examine significant items within the collection and create content for the Rare Books website. Continuing the investigative approach, the 'Great Archaeological Dig' project (also based in Rare Books), enabled **Ella Turner** (MA Information Management, CSU), **Melinda Hilton** (Grad. Dip. Museum Studies, Deakin) and **Gemma Lee** (PhD Classics and Archaeology, UoM) to explore a selection of beautiful books and document new information and hidden details. Also exploring the rich holdings of the Rare Books Collection were **Deirdre Cannon** (graduate MA Art Curatorship, UoM) and **Kim Hitchcock** (graduate MA Art Curatorship, UoM) who continued this theme of discovery by contributing to the '10 Great Books' project, an on-line gallery highlighting items from the Rare Books Collection. **Nisha Younan Marqus** (MA Education, ACU) worked on a translation and research project

involving a 7th century Nestorian manuscript. Her findings will help improve the description and on-line discoverability of the Middle Eastern Manuscript Collection.

Rosalie Mickan's (MA Urban and Cultural Heritage, UoM) project with the Baillieu Library Print Collection saw her catalogue and research the 17th century French *Leeds Album* which comprises over 245 engraved portrait prints enhanced by the addition of handwritten annotations and poetry. Rosalie's research yielded some fascinating results which will add much to this field. Also at the Print Collection, **Caroline Ritchie** (Bachelor of Arts, Oxford) investigated the attribution of a drawing, created labels and wrote a post for the Special Collections blog. **Kelly Russ** (MA History, Deakin) worked on a project with the Property and Campus Services Photographic Collection where she explored how the collection related to other similar photographic collections on campus. Kelly's findings will help inform the long-term management plans for the Collection. At the Grainger Museum, **Gloria Gamboz** (MA Cultural Materials Conservation, UoM) was involved in a research and collection management focused project with the Helen Lempriere Collection. Through her project work intellectual, digital and physical access to the collection have been improved.

Reetika Khanna (Bachelor of Arts, UoM) is researching the nine original Australian artworks within the Louise Hanson-Dyer visitors' book. The volume, part of the Rare Music Collection, is highly significant as the original, full-page artworks are by well-known Australian artists including Arthur Streeton, William McInnes and Dora Meeson. **Eleanor Simcoe's** (graduate Art History, UoM) project at the Ian Potter Museum of Art has included researching artists represented in the Buxton Contemporary Collection which will contribute to a digital resource that will expand knowledge of the collection in anticipation of the launch of this new museum.

Several **curatorial projects** offered this year provided insight into exhibition processes. **Susannah Britt** (MA Art Curatorship, UoM) curated a photographic exhibition in University House. The exhibition showcased objects from the Ed Muirhead Physics Museum that represented key areas of scientific investigation undertaken by the School of Physics. The photographs capture the beauty, craftsmanship and ingenuity of the collection. Similarly, **Tahney Fosdike** (MA Art Curatorship, UoM) curated *The School on the hill* which featured objects from the Creswick Campus Historical Collection. On display at Creswick, the exhibition tells the story of 100 years of Forestry education in Victoria. **Carly Skinner** (MA Art Curatorship, UoM) explored the cultural collections and identified subjects that could form future displays in Arts West and the Ephemeral Exhibitions Space located on the ground floor of the Baillieu Library. While **Debbie Robinson** (PhD Art History, UoM) assisted with various curatorial tasks for the *Art on the Page* exhibition displayed in the Noel Shaw Gallery, Baillieu Library. At the Medical History Museum, **Ingrid Schreiber** (BA Honours, UoM) contributed to research for an exhibition about birthing rituals and practices to be held next year, while **Eleanor Wallace** (MA Art Curatorship, UoM) was involved in a research project for an upcoming exhibition at the Museum that will explore bush medicine.



Susannah Britt puts the finishing touches on her exhibition at University House.

There were several **public program projects** where participants could contribute to ventures that highlighted the collections in the public sphere. The Science Gallery Melbourne's first exhibition *Blood* provided some excellent opportunities for students. **Brooke Ainscow** (graduate MA Art Curatorship, UoM) assisted in the development of social media for the exhibition which included collaboration with the Science Gallery team in London. While **Ingrid Knarston's** (PhD, Murdoch Children's Research Institute) project work involved creating narratives and selecting items from the University's collections for inclusion in the exhibition, conducting interviews and being involved in the creation of podcasts. **Matthew Watts** (MA Art Curatorship, UoM) was assigned an academic engagement project with the Baillieu Library Print Collection that explored ways that greater numbers of academics and students could utilise the collection as part of their classes. Meanwhile, **Panida Cherdjareewattananun** (MA Art Curatorship, UoM) and **Madeleine Thorburn** (graduate MA Arts and Cultural Management, UoM) both wanting to develop practical skills in public programs, worked on a project which aimed to attract new audiences to the collections and activities of the Grainger Museum and Special Collections. At the Grainger Museum, **Kerry Andersson** (Grad. Cert. Arts and Cultural Management, Deakin) developed resources for the museum that would be used in the training of volunteers to give public tours and improve the visitor experience.

Archival documentation, inventory and digitisation projects were again a popular choice with students and volunteers. **Rachel Ciesla's** (MA Art Curatorship and recent graduate of Medicine, UoM) project offered jointly by the Medical History Museum and Harry Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology, involved completing an inventory and researching the documents and



Kelly Russ studies the photos in the PCS Photographic Collection



Teresa Hu rehousing botanical specimens in the Herbarium

objects from the Dept. of Anatomy and Neuroscience Collection. At the VCA's School of Film and Television Digital Archive, **Lily Bennion's** (MA Cultural Materials Conservation, UoM) project had her cataloguing the School's archive of student film prints, tapes and materials. After completing an initial survey of a selection of works, Lily has been recording descriptive metadata of the newly digitised films which involved watching the films and documenting any salient information. This project will make the films more accessible and aid in their long-term preservation. Working with the Law Rare Book Collection, **Sally Malamas** (MA Art Curatorship, UoM) completed an inventory on the books in the George Paton Collection which relate to Australian law topics. **Clare McLeod** (graduate Dip. Art History, UoM) and **Michael Slater** (graduate MA Information Studies, CSU) have contributed to an ongoing inventory project for the slides, photographs and albums that comprise the Property and Campus Services Photographic Collection. Both found it to have enhanced their inventory skills and knowledge of the University's changing built environment! Continuing the architectural theme, **Michelle Laurent** (BA Ancient History, Macquarie) completed an inventory and rehousing project with the Dr Ernest Fooks Collection in the Architecture, Building and Planning Library's Rare Materials Collection. Dr Fooks was a prominent Viennese architect who came to Melbourne in 1939 and made a significant contribution to architecture, town planning, and design education in Australia and to the city's cultural life. Michelle's project will make this collection more accessible and help ensure its future longevity.

At the Ed Muirhead Physics Museum **Lorraine McCart** (graduate MA Cultural Materials Conservation, UoM) has recently commenced an inventory and rehousing project involving the Museum's archives. **Eren Tuncer** (Doctor of Dental Surgery, UoM) and **William Tan-Orders** (Doctor of Dental Surgery, UoM) have been working with the Forensic Slide Collection which is part of the Melbourne Dental School's Anatomy, Oral Pathology and Forensic Odontology's teaching collection. They have been sorting, cataloguing, rehousing and digitising this important and unique collection which will aid in its long-term access, storage and preservation. Eren and William have enjoyed the project which has enabled them to focus on a different side of dentistry from clinical practice. At the Grainger Museum **Kyle Walker** (graduate MA Fine Arts, UNSW) worked on a photographic project where he digitally captured domestic items in the collection and linked the files to the *EMu* database.

Lastly, there were **general collection management project** placements which defy easy categorisation! **Bronwyn Beech-Jones** (BA Honours, History and Indonesian, UoM) and **Mary Hurley McGillivray** (BA Art History, UoM) based at the University of Melbourne Archives, were involved in the development of on-line subject guides. The new, dynamic and user-friendly guides will offer a more accessible entry point for researchers accessing the vast collections of the UMA. Also at the Archives, **Jacqui Baker** (graduate BA Honours History, Deakin) has been working on various collection management tasks with the VWLLFA poster collection. Similarly, **Kara Williams** (BA Information Studies, CSU) has been placed on a general project placement where she assisted in various collection management duties with the aim of increasing her understanding of how the Archives operate on a day to day basis. At the Grainger Museum, **Sharon Wong** (graduate MA Cultural Materials Conservation, UoM) has gained experience in a variety of museum operations from inventory and adding to the *EMu* catalogue through to condition reporting, exhibition installation and outgoing loans! At the HBA Museum **Nadhira Ralena** (Bachelor of Biomedicine, UoM), **Lea Haralabopoulos** (Doctor of Medicine, UoM) and **Theoni Haralabopoulos** (Doctor of Medicine, UoM) had the ideal medical science backgrounds to contribute to an ongoing museum audit, storage and rehousing project.

'Incomings and Outgoings': the *International Museums and Collections Award*

This year the two recipients of the IMAC Award enjoyed inspiring professional development opportunities overseas. In January, Melbourne student Irene Finkelde (MA in Cultural Materials Conservation), travelled to the University of Birmingham where she spent a month working with their collections. In July, Melbourne welcomed Katherine Reeve (MA Research, History of Art) from the University of Birmingham, and she enjoyed a collections-focused month that broadened her vocational skills, networks and knowledge of museums. In the following extracts, Irene and Katherine reflect on their travels and outline some of their highlights.

The University of Birmingham experience...

As the recipient of the Award I had the opportunity to develop a number of new skills whilst on the four-week placement at the University of Birmingham. I gained experience in working with museum and gallery collections and outreach and valuable practical experience in a number of areas I only had previous theoretical knowledge in.

During my placement I spent a few days each week working with the team from the Research and Cultural Collections Department. ... Collection management is an area I have been very keen to get more experience in for quite some time, as it is a requisite for many jobs in museums, so I am very thankful for the opportunity to develop new skills. It was great to be able to work on these projects ... and gain more insight into the role of a Collection Manager.

One of the highlights of my placement was working with the team and collections in the Lapworth Museum of Geology. I learnt much about collection management, policies, planning and conservation from discussions with the Director of the Museum. Working at the Barber Institute was a wonderful opportunity for me to consider how collections can be utilized in new ways and by a wide variety of people from different cultural and social backgrounds....Working at the Wilson Conservation Studio I learnt about paper conservation, preventive conservation for library and archive collections and disaster planning and preparedness.

Whilst I was in the UK/Europe I took advantage of the fact that there are so many incredible museums and galleries to visit. I travelled to Oxford, Cambridge, Paris and London. The highlights of these visits were the many natural history museums, the Pitt Rivers Museum and the George Pompidou Centre. I have detailed the collections I visited on my blog (imacaward2017.wordpress.com).

As outlined above the opportunity to travel to the UK and to work for a month at the University of Birmingham has increased my practical skills and knowledge in collection management; preventive conservation; practical conservation treatments; and museum outreach and engagement.

Irene Finkelde, February 2017



2017 IMAC Award recipient Irene Finkelde on assignment in Birmingham.

The University of Melbourne experience...



Katherine Reeve brush vacuuming a geological specimen.

The primary project with the cultural collections at the Baillieu Library was the conservation clean and research of a box of nineteenth century geological specimens. I hoped to discover their origin, their original owner and how they came to be in Melbourne. This project was a highlight of the placement because the research element of it was so rewarding. This project taught me that conservation is about more than just the physical preservation of an object, but also about preserving the history that it represents.

My time at the GCCMC gave me an introduction into the conservation of objects and paper, and a chance to take part in 'in situ' painting conservation. This aspect of the placement taught me a new set of skills that will be very beneficial to my future working with historic objects. Before starting the placement, I had expressed an interest in the intersection between art and science. So, part of my placement was based in the Herbarium, working to help finish the ongoing cataloguing project of nineteenth century botanical models. I was also able to remount botanical samples taken from the field.

My final assigned project was working with the Print Collection. This project involved helping to organise and host a public engagement day focused on Dürer's use of mathematics in art. I also spent a day in the Archives and the Rare Book collection, and volunteered at Science Gallery's exhibition BLOOD, Night Art and the War Heritage Road Show. I think these extra projects were integral to me getting the most out of my time.

My time in Melbourne has greatly increased my confidence in my ability to successfully pursue a career in the cultural sector. It has also given me international work experience, which I believe will be extremely beneficial

in the more globalised working environment today - especially considering the contacts and professional relationships I was able to develop. This placement was an incredible opportunity that I was so grateful to be a part of. The projects were diverse, stimulating and hands-on. Overall, the placement has increased my confidence, my professional skill set and my employability.

Katherine Reeve, August 2017

Year's end...

From the students and volunteers who participated in this year's Program and embraced their projects with such enthusiasm and curiosity, through to the collections staff who devised, steered or supported projects with energy and interest, I hope you continue to have magical close encounters with the collections. I wish you all the best for the festive season and year ahead.

Helen Arnoldi

Museums and Collections Projects Coordinator

December 2017