

The interconnectedness of study and passion

Jasmine Targett

2007 was a year that taught me that the environment in which you place yourself has a huge impact on your means of self-expression.

In my university career I have had two fields of fascination: artefacts and art. Until last year they have been the opposing poles at either end of the world. At the same time attracted to each other and yet repelled; melding them together appeared impossible. They seem similar, yet when you put them into the VTAC guide of courses their seemingly complementary values do not lead to a clear path. But I have always had the philosophy that if you keep choosing subjects you like doing, then one day the course and career you want to pursue will open up.

By March 2007 I had been searching fruitlessly for volunteering and internship programs for some time. Out of sheer frustration, with a teaspoonful of gumption, I approached the Ian Potter Museum of Art at the University of Melbourne. The staff informed me of the Cultural Collections Student Projects Program, to which I was immediately drawn. The Program's coordinator, Helen Arnoldi, and I sat down and discussed which of the many projects on offer would best let me explore the area of museum studies. At the time I had no idea that working at the Henry Forman Atkinson Dental



Museum would be such a revolutionary artistic influence on my fine art practice.

My first internship at the Dental Museum was working as cataloguing assistant on the dental extraction instrument collection. I dealt with over 250 artefacts dating from the 1750s to the present day. Over a period of eight months, I reviewed, expanded and updated the catalogue

information for this group of objects. My primary objectives were to assess and record the objects' size, condition, and conservation needs, using catalogue work sheets. I researched each instrument's inscriptions and background through to its commercial production. I then wrote accession numbers on archival tags, attached one to each object, and located all missing and mislabelled

Previous page: Jasmine Targett working with Professor Emeritus Henry F. Atkinson MBE, Honorary Curator, Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum.
Photography by Helen Arnoldi.

Below: Jasmine Targett, *Phallus* (blue), *Bimanous* (apricot), *Digitus* (green), 2007, cast glass, dimensions variable. Private collection.
Photography by Andrew Barcham.

Right: *Phallus* (detail).



artefacts. I concluded by collating all of this information, to bring the online database up to date.

From this project I gained an understanding of basic collection management and the principles of object documentation. I learnt the correct procedures for safely handling museum artefacts as well as the need for a tried and tested methodical approach. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work under the patient tutelage of the curator Louise Murray, and honorary curator, Emeritus Professor Henry F. Atkinson (in whose honour the Museum is named). As a result I have learnt invaluable lessons which reach far beyond the experience of classroom teaching.

With a background in abstract expressionism in painting, I found myself in third year art school searching for a means to delve deeper into the human condition. I began cross-referencing anatomical and medical reference books with a holistic take on the human psyche. While researching for my art practice I came up against many brick walls, similar to those any masters student would have. My curiosity and need for more diverse raw source material in anatomy led me to utilise the resources to which I was exposed while working with the dental collection.

Through working at the Dental Museum, and also accessing other collections in the University, I discovered my reaction to the specimens to be one of fascination and fear. I was looking in the face of my own mortality, its fragility, and the impact of the un-lived or suffocated life upon the body and soul. The specimens I created in glass began to have a life of their own. They grew into entities unto themselves. Their deformity, juxtaposed against rusting and decaying medical instruments, altered and intensified my emotive reaction, and hopefully that of the viewer. The tools became alive in their natural decomposition process while the glass specimens remained preserved and a spectacle for the viewer to study. These were then illuminated on large light boxes to provoke a heightened aura of theatricality. The gallery space shifted from an operating theatre into a viewing theatre, inviting its audience to weave its way through its performance. My final installation was successful and as a result I was accepted into the 2008 honours year of fine art in glass at Monash University. I hope to develop my academic career at the University of Melbourne further down the track.

In searching for reference material that was lacking in my own field, art,

I have been able to give back to another area of study, the history of dentistry, while at the same time following my interest in museum studies and curatorship.

I am currently completing my second internship at the Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum. This has entailed the rehousing and conservation assessment of the collection of historic photographs. Completion of this project has been supported by a cultural collections grant, funded by the 2006 University Appeal. I hope to complete many more internships in various fields as my career takes in both museum curatorship and my fine art practice.

I feel the University of Melbourne should be proud of giving students opportunities for practical, out of the classroom experiences. Internships give the student a great sense of responsibility and achievement, while putting to practical use the lessons learnt in the classroom. I am now able to see career possibilities and roles that I did not know were possible.

Jasmine Targett has recently completed the honours year of her Bachelor of Fine Arts at Monash University, majoring in glass. She has worked for West Space Gallery and currently works at Heide Museum of Modern Art. Her artwork can be found in many Australian private collections and her previous places of study. Jasmine can be contacted on jasminetargett@hotmail.com

