

Introduction

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This edition of *University of Melbourne Collections* focuses on the ruminations and resonances—in a formal sense, the proceedings—of the highly successful international symposium *The Future of the Object*, which was hosted by the University of Melbourne in October 2016.

For many of us, *The Future of the Object* provided an exciting first glimpse of the ravishing design by ARM Architecture in partnership with Architectus for a truly innovative building—Arts West—the new home of much of the Faculty of Arts. Arts West is the embodiment of an exciting and new way of conceiving and teaching the humanities in Australia, particularly in the way it draws upon the university's remarkable array of cultural collections. In an era when the virtual has become its own, almost overpowering, reality, the notion that any physical object deserves to be contemplated anew might seem slightly quaint, if not antiquated. The articles in this issue of *University of Melbourne Collections* stand as a compelling contrast to such orthodoxy. Indeed, the way Arts West has been conceived and designed encourages a necessary and audacious tension between different ways of imagining the world around us: physical and abstract, corporeal and ethereal, dynamic and conceptual.

As you read these pages I hope that you will be as inspired as I am to learn of the many practical and philosophical ways in which both physical objects and metaphysical ideas are brought to life through contemplation, conservation, research, analysis, commentary and collaborative endeavour, using an intriguing array

of artefacts in a multiplicity of contexts and convergences.

The Future of the Object was part of *Cultural Collisions: Grainger | Griffins*, a campus-wide series of performances, exhibitions, installations and lectures, which made use of the abundant creativity of staff and students from across the



Opposite: Performance of Jonathan Mills' composition *Ethereal eye* in Newman College, University of Melbourne, during Cultural Collisions: Grainger | Griffins, October 2016. Performance conducted by Fabian Russell; projection artist Ian de Gruchy; multimedia design by Olaf Meyer, supported by Multimedia Events Australia. Photograph by Sharon Walker.

Right: Professor Sir Jonathan Mills AO. Photograph by Seamus McGarvie.



entire university. A new collaboration between the University of Melbourne and the Melbourne Festival, Cultural Collisions was an unashamedly idiosyncratic celebration of the continuing presence and influence of three maverick geniuses: Australian-born composer and pianist Percy Grainger, and American architects Walter Burley Griffin and his wife Marion Mahony. The university is home to the Grainger Museum, the location of Percy's extensive archive of scores, musical instruments, correspondence and artefacts. And Newman College is Australia's most important public architectural presence of the work of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony.

On any given day, the university's myriad lecture theatres, libraries and laboratories are the site of a teeming mass of invention and ingenuity, pulling in all sorts of exciting directions. Cultural Collisions: Grainger | Griffins was an example of what can be achieved when some of those singular and distinctive efforts are devised as collaborations that themselves tell a story about the role of this university in the life of Melbourne. If the initial impulse of Cultural Collisions was to honour the unconventional legacies and eccentric visions of Percy Grainger, Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony,

and to locate their ideas at the centre of a contemporary Australian university and arts festival, then the proceedings of *The Future of the Object* contained in these pages take that impetus far further than I ever imagined to be possible.

To the 37 international scholars who made *The Future of the Object* such a success, I offer my heartfelt thanks. I am grateful also to Professors Mark Considine and Jane Davidson for their support, and I congratulate Ian Anderson, Kate Darian-Smith, Jane Davidson, Rose Hiscock, Alison Inglis and Andrew May for drawing together the symposium program. Cultural Collisions: Grainger | Griffins provided a distinctive platform on which to navigate between the past and the future, with students and academics from the Faculties of Architecture, Building and Planning; Arts; Engineering; and the Victorian College of the Arts and Melbourne Conservatorium of Music; Melbourne School of Design; the Microsoft Centre for SocialNUI; musicians, architects, dancers, choreographers, sculptors, engineers, instrument designers, filmmakers, museum curators, composers and thinkers. I acknowledge the contributions of Deakin University's Motion.Lab, the Australian National Academy

of Music, the University of New South Wales' DomeLab, and Sarah Kenderdine and Jeffrey Shaw. I particularly thank vice-chancellor Professor Glyn Davis AC, vice-principal (engagement) Adrian Collette, and staff of Chancellery Engagement for their support and encouragement of the entire enterprise.

Great artists and designers such as Percy Grainger, Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony demonstrate a rare ability to absorb the circumstances of their surroundings—the prevailing shifts and shapes of our world—in weird and wonderful ways. Where the philosopher or politician might detect danger or urge caution, the artist intuits excitement and opportunity. This essential challenge to habit, comfort, orthodoxy and progress, when combined with the analytical methods and different creativity of the scientist and engineer, is what enables institutions such as the University of Melbourne to offer hope and ambition to us all.

Professor Sir Jonathan Mills AO was director of Cultural Collisions: Grainger | Griffins and vice-chancellor's (professorial) fellow at the University of Melbourne in 2016. An Australian-born composer who also holds a Master's degree in architecture, he lives in Edinburgh. He has directed many music and arts festivals, including the Edinburgh International Festival from 2006 to 2014.