

# A mutual exchange

## The Student Projects Program, Cultural Collections

Helen Arnoldi

In 2008 the University's cultural collections have continued to be enriched and supported by students participating in the Student Projects Program. Students from the University of Melbourne and other universities, in their desire to gain professional and practical work experience, have chosen to become involved with the cultural collections projects, which have provided them with a unique experience and opportunity for personal development. The collections have also benefitted from this exchange, with many collection management projects able to be extended and supported as a result of student participation.

This year has been a successful year for the program on many levels, with several cultural collections enjoying the benefits of student contribution for the first time. Similarly, for some of the students, the projects undertaken with the University's collections have been their first venture into work in the cultural sector. This experience often leads to an enduring interest in, and support for, these collections.

During the course of the year four significance assessments were completed on different collections by four students, each seeking to pursue an interest in a particular area while



simultaneously carrying out an important collection management requirement. Miriam Riverlea, a classical studies PhD student, completed a significance assessment of the Classics and Archaeology Library collection; an assessment of part of the art collection of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) was undertaken by art history student Jo Herbig; Master of Art Curatorship student Shannon McCarthy carried out an assessment of the VCA's Margaret Lawrence Ceramic Collection; and finally an assessment of the University's collection of

historic academic gowns was completed by Master of Public History student (Monash) Claire Lockyer. Using the methodology of the Heritage Collections Council,<sup>1</sup> the students invested much time in researching, gathering and appraising information on these collections. They all managed to navigate their way through varied histories and consider each collection's significance within local, national and international contexts.

More research and interpretation were undertaken with the Physics Museum and the Malcolm Fraser

**Opposite:** Jessica Lo photographing objects in the Medical History Museum's collection.

**Below:** Louisa Marks and Kerrianne Stone (Projects Officer, Prints), discussing some of the mezzotints in the Baillieu Library Print Collection.



Collection. The former saw Thomas Ryan, an engineering student with an interest in art and museums, interpret a new display for this unique collection. Through the project, he produced interpretive text panels to go inside the Museum's new display cases, thus providing a 'way in' to this fascinating collection for a general audience. Similarly, assisting in the creation of a new display of objects and photographs for the Malcolm Fraser Room in the Melbourne Law School provided Master of Art Curatorship student Beckett Rozentals with the perfect

opportunity to hone her curatorial skills.

Cataloguing and conservation tasks defined several projects. At the Ian Potter Museum of Art, three students worked closely with the Gerard Herbst Poster Collection. After being trained in the specialised techniques of poster humidification and cataloguing, the students commenced work on this large collection of international poster art. Master of Art Curatorship student Laetitia Prunetti, along with Bachelor of Fine Art students Eliana Urrutia and Rachael Bauman, spent many

hours flattening and cataloguing these works, thus contributing to their future longevity and accessibility.

A preservation project was completed by museum studies student Eleanor Brignell, who with a background in museums and science was keen to apply her skills to one of the University's scientific collections. Working in the Herbarium on the Rupp Collection, she assisted with the conservation rehousing of this important collection of botanical specimens. The Herbarium also benefitted from another student earlier this year, when Bachelor of Business Information and Knowledge Management student Vanessa Lastrina completed a project which explored how digital images of plant specimens in the collection could be managed.

Bachelor of Fine Art student Jasmine Targett, who last year helped catalogue the forceps collection at the Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum, this year catalogued that Museum's collection of photographs. Meanwhile, at the VCA, an inventory was undertaken by art history student Tzu-Hsiu Su on the Margaret Lawrence Ceramic Collection.

Several other collection management projects were hosted by Special Collections in the Baillieu Library. Margaret Ackland, studying library

Thomas Ryan working on the displays in the Physics Museum.  
All photography by Helen Arnoldi.



and information services, sorted, listed and rehoused the Helen Bianchin Archive. Library and information management student Heather Mills assisted Special Collections staff with general collection management tasks in order to gain a broader understanding of the work involved in looking after such extensive collections.

Still within the library, two Master of Art Curatorship candidates, Margaret Fleming and Louisa Marks, spent the year working with the Baillieu Library Print Collection. Their project had them examining a selection of prints where

they verified inscriptions, dates, attributions and print states.

A digitisation project has been under way at the Medical History Museum, in which Master of Art Curatorship student (and keen photographer) Jessica Lo has played an instrumental role. Jessica photographed a selection of items from the collection, and the images were then uploaded onto the electronic collection catalogue.

The University of Melbourne Archives has presented students with a varied array of projects, all of which have proved to be popular. Jan Everett, studying media and information, and Michele Fitzgerald studying business information and knowledge management, worked on a selection of material from the Lucy Kerley (National Gallery School) Archive. Meena Gupta, studying business information and knowledge management, was keen to apply her skills to the Francis Hare Archive, for which she completed a finding aid and prepared transcripts to improve researcher access. The object collection at Archives also benefitted from art history student Stacy Jewell's input to the cataloguing and rehousing of artefacts.

The projects listed above give just a taste of the tasks completed by students in the cultural collections

over the course of the past year. All of the students have been dedicated and enthusiastic in their work, and in the process have developed skills and professional networks which will serve them well as they continue with their studies or seek employment in their chosen fields. The Student Projects Program has enabled a mutual exchange between the students and the University's cultural collections, one which will continue to bring tangible benefits to both.

For more on the Student Projects Program visit our website at: [www.unimelb.edu.au/culturalcollections/projects](http://www.unimelb.edu.au/culturalcollections/projects)

**Helen Arnoldi** has been the Student Projects Coordinator, Cultural Collections, since 2005. For the past ten years she has worked extensively in collection management, including positions with the Baillieu Library Print Collection, the Ian Potter Museum of Art and the National Trust of Australia (Victoria). She has a Postgraduate Diploma in art curatorship (Melbourne), and a Master of Arts in museum studies and a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in art history, both from Monash University.

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#### Notes

- 1 Roslyn Russell and Kylie Winkworth, *Significance: A guide to assessing the significance of cultural heritage objects and collections*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia on behalf of the Heritage Collections Council, 2001.