This is the fourth and final instalment in a series of interviews with Ray Marginson by Robyn Sloggett.

**Robyn Sloggett:** The university’s sculptures certainly range from the intimate to the monumental. I know there are a number of sculptures that may surprise people by their decorative or historical significance. Perhaps you could talk about some of these small but very interesting objects.

**Ray Marginson:** One such owes much to the flair for decoration of the then staff architect Rae Featherstone. He engaged Clifford Last to do the large cast aluminium handles for the doors of the Raymond Priestley Building. This was the structure we put up in 1969 to bring the administration together and incidentally to enable the demolition of the intrusive two-storey fibro-cement hut housing administration groups that occupied a site to the north of Wilson Hall, near the beautiful blue cedar tree. The handle of the west door was removed for security reasons in the foyer remodelling a few years ago; that on the east is still there. They had been a convenient way of chaining and padlocking the building in student protests. However the other Clifford Last feature was the carved wooden back-plates in the lifts. These were removed in the last renovations to that building.

There is a great story about the Ernest Fries Progress of medicine enamel in the foyer of the medical tri-radiate building. Its backing is made of marble panels—some of the original tops of the tables in the old anatomy dissecting room in Swanston Street. When I announced to the Buildings Committee the intention to use them for this purpose, Professor Wright was greatly opposed on the grounds of the possible health danger. He vowed that he would culture bacteria from scrapings from their surface. It was a legitimate point, as the fatty residue impregnated in the porous marble is still clearly visible. Fortunately despite assiduous efforts on the part of the Department of Physiology nothing emerged. The building also houses on its fourth floor stairs the important example of student vandalism by many later highly distinguished medical graduates. These are the bench tops from the old medical lecture theatre. The depth of carving of the initials in some cases is quite remarkable. Many medical family names are immortalised: MacCallum, Ryan, Littlejohn, Trinca, Gillespie; these planks repay more than cursory study.

**Robyn Sloggett:** Your reference to what would probably be seen by Property and Campus Services as a form of vandalism of university property raises another interesting issue from a conservation point of view: that of damage to works in the grounds.

**Ray Marginson:** Fortunately this has been rare. An exception was the gift of the Greek government, the Poseidon bronze, that endured many years of Brasso polish on his genitals when located initially in the open near the Beaurepaire Centre. This affectionate student treatment continued even when it was shifted into the trophy hall. However an attack with a hacksaw blade on the same anatomical region meant it needed greater security. It now stands majestically in the interior courtyard of the Elisabeth Murdoch Building (illustrated above).
Another that suffered over the years was the *Wheel of life* by Charles Web Gilbert, a work recalling Kipling’s *Kim* (illustrated above). It was originally commissioned for the Springthorpe memorial in the Boroondara cemetery, then donated to the university as a memorial to Lilian Alexander, a medical graduate from 1893. This beautiful marble and bronze work originally stood, as I remember as a student, just inside the old east entrance to the Union Building which, at the base of the small tower, was part of the original National Museum wing, later demolished. In that location it bore two bronze Chinese dragon heads. One was later stolen and, on the work’s relocation to the foyer of the then new medical building, we removed the survivor. As far as I am aware, the head has disappeared entirely.

**Robyn Sloggett:** There are also stories of loss through theft. Were there any significant works stolen?

**Ray Marginson:** We know from anecdotal evidence and our early cataloguing work that pieces of cedar and mahogany furniture and many works of art were lost, or ‘removed’, up to 1966. This is true also I think of some of the fine collection of the Melbourne State (Teachers) College that is now part of the university holdings.

In my own time we had only two significant pieces of art stolen—one was a Norman Lindsay black and white that had, for the first Lindsay exhibition, been lent to us by the late Hume Dow. The other loss, sadly, was the bronze *Lovers* given to us by Guy Boyd. It was one of several works—including a fine Robert Dickerson (illustrated on page 7) and David Boyd’s *The trial still life*—obtained through the short-lived ‘Artists’ Choice Collection’, a project I initiated in the 1970s. *Lovers* was housed in the fourth floor bridge in the then Arts Common Room of the John Medley Building, subsequently cannibalised into offices. A substantial (and heavy) piece, it just disappeared one night and has never been recovered. Guy generously gave us its replacement, the bather figure which stands today in the east garden of University House (illustrated on page 6).
One strange incident was the theft of one of the oak thrones now in the Wilson Hall foyer, which was on display in the lift foyer on the ninth floor of the Raymond Priestley Building. It was returned after it was found on the premises of a second-hand furniture dealer. The logistics of its removal are as bewildering as that of the Guy Boyd work. The only other theft I recall was of a sterling silver two-branch candelabrum, the gift of the Society of Collectors in the 1950s. It disappeared after the splendid dinner in Wilson Hall for the 1968 Commonwealth Universities Conference. Many candelabra were borrowed for that event from service messes and other sources; ours was the only one stolen. (The rest of this remarkable collection is now safely housed in University House.) We used the $400 insurance money (it was significantly under-insured) to ask the committee of the Ernst Matthaei Memorial Collection of Early Glass to purchase a significant piece. The collection now includes a beautiful Irish dessert dish from about 1795. It should be acknowledged to the Society of Collectors, the donors of the stolen candelabrum.6

There are examples of heartless damage, possibly in the pursuit of scrap metal. One was the disappearance of the large brass lettering ‘Botany’ on that building. Also, I think, the much earlier disappearance of the bronze plaques on the student-designed war memorial, replaced by granite ones after World War II. The memorial originally had a dominating location on the main axis from Grattan Street, in front of the Quadrangle. After much negotiation with representative ex-servicemen it was relocated, a shift made necessary by the work on the underground car park. It is now located just south of the Quadrangle, near Wilson Hall.

**Robyn Sloggett:** Although I know they were few, perhaps you wouldn’t mind sharing some of your signal failures, disappointments or regrets over the long period of your interest in the cultural aspects of the university?

**Ray Marginson:** Yes, there have been several and unfortunately some have physical reminders that are constantly there to mock. The first is visible in front of the north of the Raymond Priestley Building, in the vacant square garden plot covered in low-growing shrubs. It was to be the site of a monumental Henry Moore stone sculptural work, associated with a fountain. At one period Ronald Walker headed up a body called the Fountains Trust that raised funds for that purpose. With Eric Westbrook,7 who was a close personal friend of Henry Moore, we developed a proposal which was accepted in principle by the trust, and Eric, on a visit to the UK, negotiated a major work with Moore at an agreed price. All looked well but the funding end failed. So today there is just the vacant site.

Other disappointments had to do with buildings; one such was ‘Wardlow’, the tower house on an island block in Parkville, which the university acquired. It consisted of the main house, two joined double-storey terraces and two separate terraces. With rear excavation for storage and car parking and some demolition of service areas, I saw it as an ideal home for the University of Melbourne Archives, then in cramped quarters in Barry Street. Clive, Lord Baillieu, was enthusiastic to raise funds as a result of the advocacy of Frank Strahan, then the University Archivist. All looked good but a combination of disasters, principally the sudden death of Lord Baillieu, and also the opposition of the Parkville Association (Frank was invidiously placed as a strong supporter of the Carlton Association) meant the proposal collapsed. We hung on looking for another use for this wonderful property—it had
among other features a completely intact 19th-century hall entrance with all the curtaining and swags. For a period the university’s Protocol Officer, Tom Hazell, occupied it whilst we looked for uses and later other staff members babysat it. Finally in 1990, well after my time, all had to be sold. The story is very like the ‘Miegunyah’ one I have recounted previously.

I cannot go much into the disappointments of our plans for the area of Carlton bounded by Swanston, Faraday, Cardigan and Elgin Streets. This was planned to be two major town squares at the first floor level, surrounded by student housing and academic perimeter buildings, with walk-up connection to Carlton from Cardigan Street on the east and lock-up shops to the interior sides of the squares, plus of course underground parking. We acquired much of the site and were strongly attacked by the Carlton Association, but we constructed the earth sciences and IT buildings, moved the maintenance department into an existing factory, and established the overhead bridge connection to the main site. Funding in those days was more difficult than today, and major reductions of capital grants during 1973–75 and thereafter finally defeated us.
A very similar disappointment was the proposed 1,200-space car park planned for under the sports oval. In the end it failed because of strong staff opposition to a doubling of the parking fee from $60 to $120. This was a great loss. Had it been achieved it would have alleviated some of the problems of today’s moves to rid the main site of surface parking. The 1973–75 funding cuts also saw the abandonment of a proposed second level on the sports centre. For a couple of years we made do with a large space covered by an inflatable, held up by a small motor-driven air pump, copying something similar I had seen overseas. This in the end was vandalised by unknowns with sharp knives. Now of course the second floor is in a more substantial form.

I had great plans also for a new music building to house the faculty and the manuscript and library elements of the Grainger Museum, leaving Percy Grainger’s building as a museum of music, objects, paintings, etc. We bought a major site in Berkeley Street for the proposed Business School and for Music. Fervent opposition by the faculty and others opposed to shifting Music meant that, in the end, the Business School got the whole site. Although Music still occupies the fine Art Nouveau building on Royal Parade, it is a great comfort that, after several years of being closed, the Grainger Museum has been opened in a rejuvenated and attractive form.

One thing I do regret is the incomplete cataloguing project for the collection. The first great achievement of the 1971 catalogue was followed in my time only by acquisition lists for 1971–76 and 1977–85. However, great work was done during this period by a special subcommittee of the Works of Art Committee specifically established for a computerised catalogue project. In 1983, work commenced under the direction of Kay Campbell, the then cataloguer, with Neil Harrington of my administration computer services branch. Initially software was not available and they developed a reliable system, ‘Galterm’. The university’s computer science department coincidentally developed a database program, ‘Titan’, which became fully operational in 1987. Design precautions taken with Galterm meant an easy transition to Titan. This work then proceeded under Annette Welkamp as cataloguer working with Harrington. Today of course the Ian Potter Museum of Art has a fully operational online catalogue, but much credit must be given to the early pioneering work. So this is not really a disappointment; we took it as far as we could pre-internet.

Robyn Sloggett: I know when I commenced at the university as a contract conservator in the early 1980s that your advocacy was critical to the success of much of the cultural activity on campus. What do you see as the most important points of your work on the cultural side of the university?

Ray Marginson: Leaving aside the actual initiative to start work on our collections and the founding of the gallery, it is difficult to answer that question. There are many overlaps between the cultural side and related aspects. For instance, the master plan was a new way of thinking about the site and it brought with it the need to close off areas to car traffic, which in turn produced a need to redo the south lawn with an underground car park, which I still feel is a sculptural work of art and should have got an award from the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects. Constructed to the design of an engineer, J.L. van der Molen of Loder and Bayly, this interior space is quite superb. It was at the time unique in its recreation of the great south lawn with trees in the hyperbolic paraboloid concrete shells and great landscape accompaniment by Ellis ‘Rocky’ Stones and Ron Rayment. We were very proud that the overall landscape and the
unmortared brick paving of the site received a National Trust plaque which is installed near the steps down to the Baillieu Library. But I can say there were many highlights and moments of great satisfaction, to all our mutual work over the years 1966–88. One of these was the discussions with Pat Feilman of the Ian Potter Foundation which led to the funding of your own appointment.\(^9\) It was very satisfying to create with Frances Lindsay\(^10\) the conversion of the old bacteriology building to a second exhibition space and to provide a home for the conservation centre. This latter move was critical, in my view, not just for the service you created, but because it opened the way to the achievement of an objective that I shared with Professor Margaret Manion (who succeeded me in 1989 as chair of the Works of Art Committee).\(^11\) This was to bring the gallery and the collection and its programs into even closer contact with the academic work of Fine Arts and closer to the primary purpose of the university. From the earliest days we had worked well with the department and I have mentioned how harmonious was the association with Sir Joseph Burke.\(^12\) Your appointment and the creation of the highly professional conservation service meant a real bonding back into the academic stream. Not only through the rapid development you achieved by drawing in colleagues from departments critical to your scientific approach, like Chemistry and Physics, but by the development of academic postgraduate courses in the professional area of materials conservation and all its associated aspects. This, of course, was finally endorsed by the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation being given academic status, and by your national reputation as an exposé on art fakes. Thinking again about highlights, I remember the immense satisfaction, early in my retirement, of Margaret Manion telling me of the allocation of $5 million by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor David Penington, that made possible the work of Frances Lindsay, architect Nonda Katsalidis and all involved to make a reality of our dream of a fully designed gallery; and incidentally a home for the Leckie window by Napier Waller, rescued from Wilson Hall and carefully stored from my first seeing it in 1966.\(^13\) I tried many times to find an appropriate home for it. I even had the mad idea of somehow fitting it into an extension to University House, which was fortunately

ne'er attempted. The extension to the House which was made was of course to accommodate another orphan I hawked around, the splendid Karagheusian furniture gift (illustrated opposite, above and on back cover).

Other great memories are the first gallery exhibition, which was at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV). Then came the opening of the Old Physics Gallery. Other exhibitions remain in my memory: the first Lindsay exhibition; the work of Grazia Gunn that produced the first exhibition of the Groote Eylandt barks; the L'Oiseau-Lyre exhibition; and the first Grimwade exhibition; and as I have already mentioned, the superb exhibition Frances Lindsay put together of the works of all our artists-in-residence up to 1988, as a retirement gift to me.\(^1\) There are too many great occasions to list but strangely last year I had a pleasant reminder of those days when visiting NGV Australia at Federation Square to see the Rupert Bunny exhibition. On that occasion I suddenly came across his monotypes; and there were three of our five among them.\(^1\) I remember Laurence Course of Fine Arts, fresh back from Europe, who told me of these, which he had seen on sale in Paris. In haste we made contact and secured them (example illustrated on page 10). It may seem a minor moment but it brought back all the memories of the long and fruitful collaboration with all my colleagues that led the way to the excellent manner in which the university now approaches its cultural heritage.

A further echo from the past occurred recently when talking to Ken Scarlett, the author of the authoritative *Australian sculptors*\(^1\) (and of many other more recent works); it bears setting down. Some years ago Ken was teaching at Melbourne High School, and remembered the works of art that had lined the corridors when he was a student there (which I also recall). He eventually tracked them down, piled on top of each other in the cadet corps' dungeon. Among them was a Hugh Ramsay painting of a seated girl (illustrated on front cover and on page 11), with significant damage to it. The school was not willing to pay for restoration, so Ken negotiated with the then Melbourne Teachers College who agreed to pay for the conservation of work by the NGV conservators if the school would let the college have it. All this was done. Ken later became a staff member of the college and, even later, director of its Gryphon Gallery. The relevance to our collection is that the entire art holdings of the college, then the Melbourne State College, came into our collection when in the 1980s the college was taken over by the university.

Robyn Sloggett: *I suppose we should wind up what has been a most interesting interchange and review of a critical 20 years or so in the history of the university's cultural collections, and of its site development. Thank you for sharing your time and thoughts. I'm very pleased that we've been able to record your memories of your work and of the period when both the collections and the campus changed so dramatically. I know that, like me, many people are very grateful for your advocacy for culture on campus.*
Ray Marginson: Yes, this discussion was intended to be about sculpture in the grounds. As you are well aware, Robyn, I have not covered all the artworks in the grounds, I have merely tried to record some of the more interesting background stories about the creation, acquisition or arrival on the site of some of them. Among those I have not covered are the important works by the late Tom Bass, not only the Socrates group on the north face of Wilson Hall but, perhaps not often observed, the four very large pressed cement sculptures on the west side. These were produced by an unusual and original casting method developed by Tom and which he documented. The details of this and accompanying photographs are in the possession of the university and are worthy of an article in this journal.

For those interested in this whole question, there exists an excellent pamphlet, Sculpture on campus, published by the Ian Potter Museum of Art, which also contains a guided tour. It does not, however, cover all the works I have mentioned, but does deal with many I haven’t. The other essential reference is Architecture on campus by Philip Goad and the late George Tibbits. This thorough and scholarly booklet reflects in part the lifelong work of George, who had a monumental knowledge of our site and buildings. It includes information on the sculptural and decorative aspects of the university’s built environment. I acknowledge the great help this publication has been in clarifying my memory of many of the works.

One heartening aspect of the sculpture in the grounds is that we continue to get significant works, albeit a little slowly. An important addition has been the gift in 2009 by Emeritus Professor John Lovering and his wife Kerry of a unique style of sundial, an armillary sphere. It stands in Cussonia Court. We are still waiting for another monumental work to occupy the still vacant square site just north of the Raymond Priestley Building. Any offers I wonder?

Robyn Sloggett: You mentioned in an earlier conversation a wish to record the support you had over the 20 years of your work on the cultural side of the university.

Ray Marginson: Yes, nothing we achieved could have been possible without the support of my fellow pioneers who worked with so much dedication and patience, particularly in the first difficult years of establishing the university gallery. I have mentioned many of their names incidentally in our talks. They include the Works of Art Committee, my own staff, the Fine Arts Department, the gallery staff and our great supporting sponsors including state and commonwealth authorities, foundations, business firms and individuals.

It would be remiss of me not to say also that, as everyone in universities well knows, no continued and effective work of this kind is possible without the support of the vice-chancellor of the day. In this I was most fortunate having such firm support from Sir David Derham and Professor David Caro. David’s wife, Fiona Caro, was also a great support on the Works of Art Committee.

The university’s greatest debt in the changes achieved in the physical side of the campus was however to the sustained creative contribution of Maurie Pawsey, my deputy as Controller of Buildings and Property. This is fully set out in Juliet Flesch’s comprehensive book Minding the shop, and I thank him. However, in winding up I must again emphasise the great importance to the gallery of our founding curator, the late Mrs Betty Clarke, and of my own personal assistant, Mrs Robin Patton.

Thanks also to you Robyn, who pushed me into this writing project and designed the questions that stirred my memory so effectively,
also to the University Library for publishing the series in its magazine.

Next year—2012—is the 40th anniversary of the founding of the university gallery, and I understand planning is in train for suitable celebrations at the Ian Potter Museum of Art.

Dr Ray Marginson AM was Vice-Principal of the University of Melbourne from 1965 to 1988.

Associate Professor Dr Robyn Sloggett is Director of the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation at the University of Melbourne.


2 Ernest Fries, Progress of medicine, c. 1970, vitreous enamel, edges gold-plated, symbolic flame: 227.2 x 92.8 cm; six panels: each 61.9 x 40.0 cm. Reg. no. 1970.0234.001.002, purchased with funds from the Medical Centre Project Fund, 1970, University of Melbourne Art Collection.

3 Pycodon. Greek, c. 1950, cast bronze, height: 202.2 cm. Reg. no. 1956.0016, gift of the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne in commemoration of the XVI Olympiad, 1956, University of Melbourne Art Collection.

4 Guy Boyd, Lovers, 1972, bronze, height: 76.0 cm. Reg. no. 1972.00077, gift of the artist for the Artists’ Choice Collection, 1972, University of Melbourne Art Collection.

5 David Boyd, The trial still life, 1962, oil on composition board, 130.5 x 129.4 cm. Reg. no. 1972.0027, gift of the artist for the Artists’ Choice Collection, 1972, University of Melbourne Art Collection.

6 Sweet dish, Irish, c. 1795, glass, height: 22.5 cm. Reg. no. 1981.0037, Ernst Matthaei Memorial Collection of Early Glass, University of Melbourne. For more information on this collection, see Peter Attiwill, ‘The Ernst Matthaei Memorial Collection of Early Glass’, University of Melbourne Collections, issue 8, June 2011, pp. 37–46. Peter Attiwill has been key to the development and management of that collection for many years.

7 Eric Westbrook (1915–2005); artist, gallery director and arts administrator; Director, National Gallery of Victoria 1956–75; Director, Victorian Ministry for the Arts 1976–80.


9 Robyn Sloggett was appointed University Conservator in 1987.

10 Frances Lindsay (b. 1946); director of the University Library for many years.

11 Emeritus Professor Margaret Manion AO (b. 1935); specialist in Medieval and Renaissance art, particularly illuminated manuscripts; Herald Professor of Fine Arts, University of Melbourne 1979–95.

12 Professor Sir Joseph Burke CBE (1913–1992); teacher, writer, art historian and administrator; Herald Professor of Fine Arts, University of Melbourne, 1947–78.

13 Napier Waller, The Leckie window, 1935, stained glass, lead, approx. 10 metres x 130 cm in original location. Reg. no. 1935.0002.001.059, gift of John E. Leckie, 1935, University of Melbourne Art Collection.


15 The University’s five Rupert Bunny monotypes are: Untitled (Cupid assisting Venus), c. 1898, oil monotype on wove paper, 35.0 x 25.0 cm (plate); Untitled (Death’s summons), c. 1898, oil monotype on wove paper, 25.0 x 34.8 cm (plate); Untitled (Three sirens), c. 1898–1900, oil monotype on wove paper, 24.5 x 25.0 cm; Untitled (Mermaid watching companions), c. 1898, oil monotype on wove paper, 24.8 x 34.6 cm (plate); Untitled (Nymph reclining by a stream), c. 1898–1902, oil monotype on wove paper, 24.8 x 34.7 cm (plate). Reg. nos. 1972.0002–1972.0006, purchased with funds from the Charles Duplan Lloyd Trust, 1972, University of Melbourne Art Collection.


17 Tom Bass, Trial of Socrates, 1956, copper, approx. 350 x 457 cm. Reg. no. 0000.0086, University of Melbourne Art Collection.

18 Tom Bass, Wilson Hall west wall reliefs: Observation; Contemplation; Teaching and learning; The talents of knowledge; pressed cement, each panel approx. 275 x 397 cm. Reg. no. 0000.0087.001.004, commissioned c. 1937, University of Melbourne Art Collection. See also Emily Wubben and Jason Benjamin, ‘The art of Wilson Hall’, University of Melbourne Collections, issue 7, December 2010, pp. 3–11.


21 Juliet Flesch, Minding the shop: People and events that shaped the Department of Property and Buildings 1853–2003 at the University of Melbourne, Department of Property and Buildings, University of Melbourne, 2005.