

# Hoard House

NEWS FROM THE GRAINGER MUSEUM

## News from the Manager's Desk

Prior to writing this report, I reflected upon the previous March edition of *News from the Manager's Desk* and our progress against the many activities and events planned at the time. I am delighted to say that we have exceeded expectations. Our involvement with external events *Nite Art*, *Rare Book Week*, *Open House Melbourne* and the Cultural Program for the *International Aids Conference*, all overlapped with the University's biennial *Cultural Treasures Festival*. This was extraordinarily intensive, but a most successful period, resulting in the largest visitation spike in the history of the Grainger Museum. Almost 2,000 visitors walked through the doors in the last week of July. Many of these were visiting for the first time and enjoyed our permanent exhibition and our new temporary exhibition, *An artist's utopia: Mortimer Menpes in Japan*, which was strategically opened on 22 July. Significantly, visitors were from a broad range of demographics with *Nite Art* attracting an impressive 300 people in one five hour stretch. Most were in the hard-to-attract under 25 age group.



Mortimer Menpes *Heavy laden*, 1913–14  
Pangbourne, England, colour etching and drypoint.  
Grainger Museum collection.

Whilst involvement in these large well publicised events is very satisfying I am conscious that the key to long term successful engagement is in building a strong profile through meaningful academic curriculum links and outcomes, excellence in programming and targeted promotion. This year as well as our popular new temporary exhibition, we programmed ten lectures and musical performances exploring a broad range of collection themes and musical genres, attracting ever increasing numbers of new visitors as well as growing our loyal visitor base. With clever regular programming and promotion, *'Music at the Grainger'* on Sunday afternoons in particular, has the potential to become a popular Melbourne happening, limited only by the numbers we can realistically accommodate.

We worked with various academics from the University's VCA, Graduate Centre of Education, Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation (CCMC) and the Arts Faculty to provide targeted learning opportunities within the Museum, under Curator Astrid Krautschneider's professional guidance. Eight students from the CCMC worked on the conservation of Grainger collection items as a component of their Masters Degrees. Assistant Curator Monica Syrette supervised two very successful student intern projects, both providing valuable input into Grainger Museum collection research. Also under Monica's project management, our exciting new website (phase one) is nearly finished and should be operational by the end of the year.

Throughout the year the Management of the University of Melbourne with the assistance of Strategy & Consulting have been undertaking a review of the operation of the University in the context of funding cuts. The Business Improvement Plan (BIP) which has looked specifically at the operational and staffing levels of the University's professional staff, has



Astrid Krautschneider and Brian Allison installing the Mortimer Menpes' exhibition. Photograph by Nina Waters.

recommended a move to a shared services model. A consequence of this is that the management and operation of the Grainger Museum will merge with that of the Baillieu Library's Special Collections (rare books and manuscripts and the print collection). Unfortunately as part of this significant restructure, the Grainger Museum will bid a sad farewell to long-term staff members Brian Allison and Monica Syrette, as well as our effervescent front of house supervisor Nina Waters (who has decided it is time to retire to the beautiful Bellarine Peninsula). I too will be moving on, to head up the new Cultural Collections team—of which the Grainger Museum is an integral part. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Brian and Monica for their many years of dedicated service and passion for all things Grainger, and wish them well in their future endeavours.

Next year we are launching a more regular news bulletin for Grainger Museum supporters and look forward to keeping you informed of our new exhibitions and programs throughout 2015.

In the meantime I wish you all a safe and happy festive season and a prosperous New Year.

**Jo-Anne Cooper**  
Manager



# In and Out, Over and Under: Nite Art at the Grainger Museum

**An interactive audio-visual installation responding to Grainger's Free Music by Roger Alsop and University of Melbourne students: curated by Anna Briers.**

I believe that the music of the future will be more soul-satisfying—more melodious, more many-voiced, more complex, more rapturous, more angelic in mood—than any music of the past. [Percy Grainger 1933]

*In and Out, Over and Under* is an interactive media work that responds to the Grainger Museum in many ways. When seen from above, the interconnected nature of the Museum building itself, I believe, can be viewed as a metaphor for Percy Grainger's life and music. He combined a deep interest for English and Danish folk music with an equally deep interest in new music, inventing instruments that were unique in concept and intention; he altered the English language to fit his Nordic interests; he saw music as the most inclusive art; he designed and made new clothes; he was a prolific and candid correspondent; and his erotic life was striking.

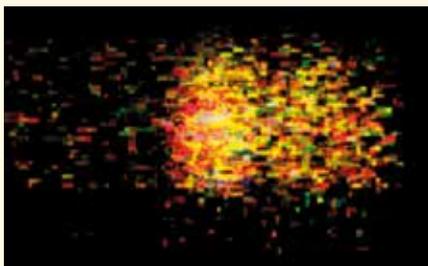


Inside the Grainger courtyard. Photograph by Nina Waters.

Grainger had the ability to work successfully within the constraints of his times but not be subject to them. He had a spirit that paid little heed to the mores often placed on the successful artist, yet did so knowingly and with grace and deference.

Grainger considered his 'Free Music' as his work of greatest importance, his legacy of consequence. He wanted to make gliding tones, close intervals, not be constrained by rhythms, and for all parts to be independent. He saw that this emancipation was hinted at by the innovations of other composers, but he was the one who combined them into 'Free Music'. Grainger believed that his new creations would reflect the freedoms seen in nature and provided by technological innovations, which was lacking in the mosaic-like determinism of much music.

He went to extraordinary lengths to create this reality, working with his friend Burnett Cross to fabricate instruments with great expressive capacity; a process that required—and inspired—innovative creative approaches. Unfortunately he could not see his inventions developed to their full



*In and Out, Over and Under* 2014, Computer-generated still from interactive media work, dimensions variable

potential, nor could he be part of the rapid, exponential developments in electronic music that came shortly after his death and continue to this day.

Grainger was open to many ideas and were he alive in the age of digital art he would have used the vast range of possibilities now available to express his creativity and invention. He would have been able to expand current mores with the grace and deference he showed while alive.

*In and Out, Over and Under* considers these attributes in its conceptual inspiration, taking the Cross-Grainger 'Kangaroo-Pouch Tone-Tool' and the incomplete 'Electric-Eye Tone-Tool' as the starting point of its musical inspiration. These instruments create electronic sounds using changes in light to express Grainger's ideas and the instrument built to create *In and Out, Over and Under* does the same.

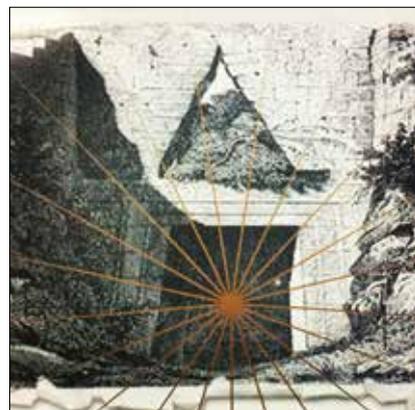
The Cross-Grainger 'Kangaroo-Pouch/Electric-Eye Tone Tools' use light and shape to compose and create sounds, and *In and Out, Over and Under* uses light from the audience and the shape of their shadows to play the sounds heard. In keeping with Grainger's ideas of music not confined by rhythm and pitch, and the electronic nature of Grainger's original instruments, the sounds created are similar to those Grainger may have heard when he composed for his instruments, but placed in a contemporary context.

While Grainger did not work with images and music, his visual ideas were well ahead of his time as seen in the designs of his terry-towelling clothes. *In and Out, Over and Under* includes images as a part of the interactive composition. These include Grainger at varying times in his life, drawings and photographs of his instruments, images of his personal effects and of important people in his life. The projection of the images onto the walls of the Grainger courtyard is affected by the movement of the participants in the installation and the sounds created by their movements.

## Roger Alsop

This paper draws heavily from the work of Kay Dreyfus, Malcolm Gillies, Rainer Linz, and from [www.percygrainger.org](http://www.percygrainger.org)

Roger Alsop is a sound and video artist working across all areas of performance and lecturing at the Victorian College of the Arts. He is currently designing interactive software and hardware systems which integrate lighting, sound and audio-visual components to create interactive works exploring the processes of creation and perception.



## Standing room only for *LIMINAL* a performance by Nick Tsiavos

*Looking back over my work the past twenty years or so, I note that apparently disparate threads of interest have woven themselves into a core of ideas that define my performance and compositional language, and perhaps also, at some level, define me. The potency and beauty of ancient sacred chant, both Medieval and Byzantine, has always fascinated me. My earliest musical memories are of the singing in Greek Orthodox churches. These memories were soon overwritten by stronger forces in contemporary culture; rock, jazz and what is quaintly called 'classical music'. These genres were viewed by me as avenues to be travelled upon, explored critically and drawn into a cartography of ideas that would both inform and propel my work, as well as placing it within a greater contextual framework. The passion and depth of meaning in ancient sacred text; the instability, energy and structural possibility of rock, jazz and modern art music; the stillness and static tension within minimalism, all underpinned by the restless anima of improvisation, have become increasingly understood by myself as my own lingua franca.*

*This project is yet another stage in the development of my personal music vocabulary, where the ideas around text, and its deconstruction, are explored and rewritten. This act is executed almost as a palimpsest, but one that never obliterates the text before, instead an uneasy coexistence between the ancient and modern is created in this bed of instability. This is where the idea of how to reconcile the historic and geographic distances between the chant and the contemporary performance can occur, without presenting the work as an artefact collecting dust in a museum, routinely brought out and presented as an archaic form of exotica. I believe this collision between what is ancient and what is modern disallows a stable view of music possibility, instead, it generates new energies and perspectives that reveal and explore, at a very deep level, the individual natures of the contributing performers. The musicians who joined me for *LIMINAL* are four remarkable artists; all their histories indicate a willingness, and an ability, to search*

for transcendent beauty within the grit and dissonance of modern art music.

I wrote these notes for the CD *LIMINAL* a few years ago, yet they remain pertinent and at the core of our intention each time we perform this program. In *LIMINAL*, I explore three beautiful fragments of chant from both Eastern and Western traditions. These works exist and are deconstructed against the critical, questioning subtexts of the Shaman Dances and improvisatory responses to the work, 'Hodie Christus natus est'. The three fragments of chant outline three broad arcs, giving a fleeting glimpse of the structural and substructural elements. This architecture is in continual play with platforms of instability and areas within the structure that are created to allow greater improvisatory input from the performers. The philosophy and various subtexts underpinning this work immerse the performer and listener into a sonic landscape. Art is able to be an act of transformation, to become a journey which allows a transcendence of the everyday. This journey is one where it is possible to resonate and perceive the beauty of the liminal state.



Peter Neville, Deborah Kayser, Nick Tsiavos, Leah Scholes, Adam Simmons. Photograph by Brian Allison.

**Nick Tsiavos** has been exploring the thread of sacred, ancient chant as it is deconstructed through a modernist prism in various formats such as solo, duo, trio and quintet configurations for 25 years. This has included performances in international music festivals including Estonia, Norway and Greece, as well as major art festivals in Adelaide, Melbourne, Canberra and MONA FOMA, Hobart. His music is broadcast extensively on ABC Classic FM, ABC RN and 3PBS FM.

*LIMINAL* and its 'sister work' *Maps for losing oneself* were performed in two midnight concerts at St David's Cathedral, Hobart for the July DARK MOFO Festival.

A concert of new work for duo and trio was performed at the Melbourne Recital Centre also in July. Tsiavos' seven hour epic undertaking, *Akathistos: the Machinies of Ritual*, first performed for 2013 MONA FOMA, was reprised for Ballarat's Festival of Slow Music in August.



Thomas A. Sisley (1846–1924), *Albert Park Lagoon* 1889, watercolour on paper, Grainger Museum collection.

## Thomas A. Sisley: an impression

'... Mr Sisley provided me with my whole artistic life's inspiration'

—Percy Grainger<sup>1</sup>

Taken at face value, this is high praise indeed. But there is more, much more:

*'If Mr. Sisley's painting [hangs at the Grainger Museum] is really of the Albert Park Lagoon, it may be that he also awakened my taste for that delicious spot, thereby sowing the seeds of my "Free Music"—for it was watching the irregular lapping of water along the side of boats on the Albert Park Lagoon sometime in my childhood that started me off with the 'irregular rhythms' that were my first step towards "Free Music". So my indebtedness to Mr. Sisley is boundless'.*<sup>2</sup>



Unknown photographer, Thomas A. Sisley, silver gelatin copy of original, n.d., Grainger Museum collection.

Sisley, the 'beau ideal' of a teacher according to Percy's father, provided tuition in elocution, painting and drama to the pre-teenager and introduced him to serious Nordic literature. Later he wrote, 'You might well have been made a painter but you were a musician by nature'.<sup>3</sup>

Two of the major themes of Grainger's life then—Free Music and the Icelandic Sagas—may be traced in part to Thomas A. Sisley.

Later in life Percy rated Sisley, aside from his mother, as the most important individual influencing his personality after an English boarder at his childhood home, the painter A. E. Aldis (1865–1921).

*But who was Sisley?*

Thomas Alexander Sisley was born in London to an art dealer father in 1846. He was closely related to the famous Impressionist painter Alfred Sisley through their ancestors, the (essentially peasant-stock) Sisleys of Romney Marsh in Kent.

In the most complicated of family trees, Thomas and Alfred's fathers, Charles and William (resulting from smuggler-turned-silk merchant Thomas Sisley snr marrying in succession two cultured French sisters named Dagneau), were three-quarter brothers. The boys' mothers, sisters Elizabeth and Felicia Sell, were Sisley-line first cousins of their husbands!

After a few years living close to each other in Paris in the late 1850s, destiny divided both young Sisleys.

Painter Alfred Sisley was born, lived mostly, and died in France as a pauper in 1899. Gone but not forgotten.

Thomas A. Sisley on the other hand cosily settled in as a clerk in the Tea Department of Her Majesty's Customs in London before keeping up the family tradition and marrying his first cousin Susan Sisley in 1870. Earlier, he was top entry student in London and second in the United Kingdom for the Arts course at Oxford but straitened circumstances prevented university study. Gustave Garcia of the Royal Academy later tutored him in singing and declamation.

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# The travelling artist

When Percy Aldridge Grainger, the young virtuoso pianist, arrived in London in 1901, South Australian-born artist Mortimer Menpes (1855–1938), was enjoying almost superstar status in London's art world. He took Grainger under his wing and promoted him within the glitterati and aristocracy of London society. Despite a 27 year difference in age, Menpes and Grainger became close friends.

Mortimer Luddington Menpes began his *Who's Who* entry in 1936 by describing himself as a 'painter, etcher, raconteur, and rifle shot...'. His humorous summation falls far short of giving a realistic understanding of the sheer breadth of his achievements. He left Adelaide for England in 1875 at age 19 to undertake studies in painting and etching at the National Art Training School at South Kensington. His prodigious talent led him to have ten of his etchings and drypoints accepted by the British Museum print collection in 1880. In the same year Menpes met the irascible but charismatic artist, James McNeill Whistler, and the two developed a friendship and professional relationship with Menpes becoming Whistler's studio assistant.

In 1887 Menpes travelled to Japan, a journey that would become a pivotal time in his career. When he returned in 1888, he held an exhibition of oils and etchings of Japanese scenes at the fashionable Dowdeswell's Gallery in London's New Bond Street. The exhibition received critical acclaim and sold out almost immediately. However it also prompted Menpes and Whistler to have a fiery and very public falling-out—Menpes had not acknowledged Whistler as his master!

In the early 1890s Menpes moved into society portraiture. He planned his new studio with a very innovative eye. He had a substantial house designed by leading Arts & Crafts architect AH Mackmurdo in London's fashionable Belgravia. In 1896 he made another journey to Japan, this time to have the house's fittings fabricated by Japanese artisans. When the house was fully fitted-out, the result was a lavish, exotic experiment in Japonisme.

In 1900 Menpes went to South Africa as a war artist, returning home with a sheaf of paintings and sketches that he published through the firm Adam & Charles Black. He used a new three-colour half-tone printing technique recently invented by Carl Hentschel, to reproduce his images. *War impressions: being a record in colour* proved to be a very successful publication. The following year A & C Black presented Mortimer Menpes' *Japan: a record in colour* to an eagerly awaiting public. This extraordinary view into the world of feudal



Mortimer Menpes *Portrait of the artist*, 1916–1920 (detail). Etching and drypoint on paper. Grainger Museum collection.

Japan proved immensely popular, selling over 19,000 copies. It launched Menpes' lucrative publishing career. His long list of titles was to include: *Venice; The Durbar; Brittany; China; The world's children; The people of India and Whistler as I knew him*. Each book was extensively illustrated by Menpes from preparatory images made on his travels.

Like his friend Percy Grainger, Menpes had a restless but inventive mind. Although he continued to make prints and paint, he made a very dramatic career change by becoming an orchardist—leaving London's high society for the rural tranquillity of Pangbourne in Berkshire.

## Brian Allison

Curator, Exhibitions and Public Programs

The exhibition *An artist's utopia: Mortimer Menpes in Japan* is presently showing in the Grainger Museum until the end of March 2015.

## References

- 1 Morgan, Gary, *The etched works of Mortimer Menpes*, 3 Volumes, South Australia: Stuart Galleries, 2012
- 2 Dreyfus, Kay (Ed), *The farthest north of humanness: Letters of Percy Grainger 1901–14*: South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1985
- 3 <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezp.lib.unimelb.edu.au/view/article/38958> accessed 28 November 2014

Fast forward 20 years to 1889 and we find the Sisley family immigrating to Australia where artistic intellectual Thomas A. becomes a full-time elocutionist and reads a paper to the Royal Society in Melbourne on 'The Philosophy of Names' just months after arriving. Learned articles and poetry in *The Argus* and *Bulletin* follow.

Through the 1890s and beyond, Sisley taught at schools of elocution, the Melbourne University Conservatorium of Music (a founding staff member), Ormond College and The Working Men's College (now RMIT University). Two of his daughters, Barbara and Olive, followed in his elocutionary footsteps; Barbara later moving to Brisbane to pioneer dramatic repertory theatre.

As a connoisseur and Secretary of the Victorian Artists' Society (VAS), Sisley ensured a refined musical programme accompanied the Society's first exhibition in their new galleries in 1892 and throughout his tenure. Later in the decade, the VAS housed the University Conservatorium of Music under colleague G.W.L. Marshall-Hall before it moved on campus in 1900, without Marshall-Hall.

Long letters between Sisley and expatriate Grainger reveal a deep analysis of music and warmly reflect their past association. Celebrated daughter Barbara also continued the family connection that professionally started for her while performing at the same public concert as young Percy in 1894, his debut year.

Virtually unknown today, Grainger guiding light, Thomas A. Sisley, died at his son's home at Edithvale in 1924, aged 78 years ... appropriately within hearing distance of the breaking waves of Port Phillip Bay.

## Ian Hobbs

Melbourne writer

- 1 Grainger Museum legend, 1956, Grainger Museum collection
- 2 Grainger Museum legend, 1956, Grainger Museum collection
- 3 Sisley letter, 1922, Grainger Museum collection

## GRAINGER MUSEUM

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Hoard House  
News from the Grainger Museum  
Editor: Nina Waters  
Design: Janet Boschen  
Produced by the Grainger Museum  
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## An artist's utopia: Mortimer Menpes in Japan

July 2014 – March 2015  
Grainger Museum

EXHIBITION ON NOW

