

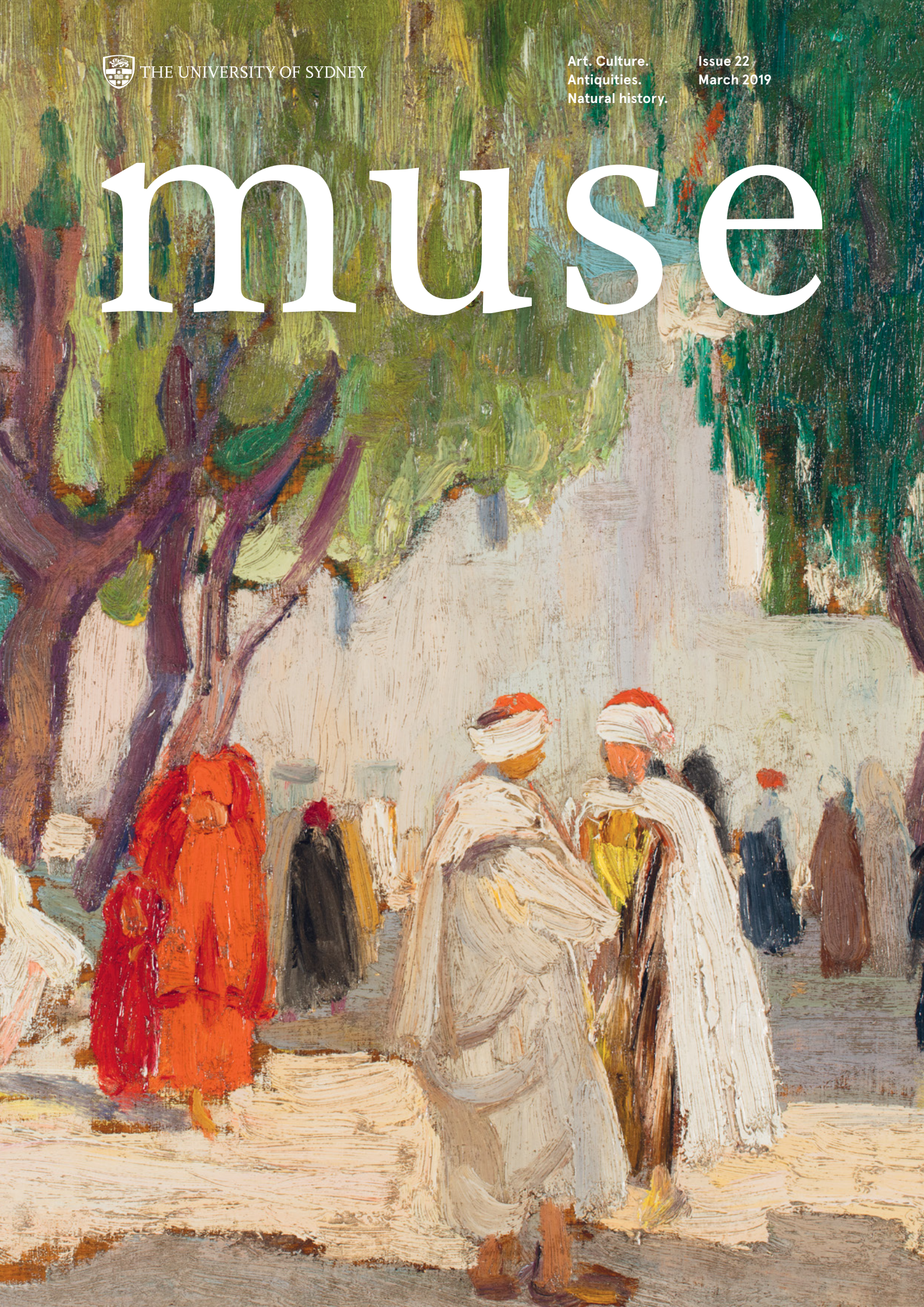


THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Art. Culture.  
Antiquities.  
Natural history.

Issue 22  
March 2019

# musée



# Mystery and generosity

A word from the Director, David Ellis

Our varied collections disclose innumerable stories – of origins, lives, motivations and associations. Adding to this is the generosity of donors and their gifts. On page 30 of this issue of *Muse*, we list our supporters whose donations of gifts, resources or time make such an important contribution to these evolving revelations.

This month's stories begin with the current state of the building program of the Chau Chak Wing Museum, itself the outcome of incredible generosity. We are already benefitting from the burgeoning profile of the museum through the continued generosity of object donations, thanks to the expectation of increased visitation, relevance, and exposure for once private, and now public, collections.

Among the many names in the list of donors is Mr Neville H Grace. An astute and passionate collector of Australian impressionist paintings, his generous bequest of 63 paintings

will be able to be enjoyed in the opening displays of the Chau Chak Wing Museum. We will be detailing this bequest in more detail in a future *Muse*, and of course, at opening.

Recently placed under the strategic guidance of University Museums, public sculpture on campus is increasingly valued and planned as an important element of the campus experience. In this issue, we feature the newest public artworks on campus: a suite of works by Dale Harding – a descendant of the Bidjara, Garingal and Ghungalu peoples – that invigorate Eastern Avenue and tie the new Life, Earth and Environmental Sciences (LEES) building to its location.

Also in this issue, we share surprise discoveries and solutions to mysteries uncovered as we prepare and research our collections for the opening of the new museum in mid-2020. The discovery of a fragmentary

duck figurine from Jericho, contrasts with bold scientific designs that reveal microscopic worlds and the complex and multiple uses of Vanuatuan string figures.

I hope you enjoy this issue's mix of mystery and generosity.

**David Ellis**  
Director, Museums and  
Cultural Engagement



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## Sydney University Museums

Comprising the Macleay Museum, Nicholson Museum and University Art Gallery

The Macleay Museum and the University Art Gallery are now closed as we prepare for the opening of the Chau Chak Wing Museum.

The Nicholson Museum remains open: Monday to Friday, 10am to 4.30pm and the first Saturday of every month, 12 to 4pm. Closed on public holidays.

**General admission is free.**

Become a fan on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.  
[sydney.edu.au/museums](https://sydney.edu.au/museums)

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*Muse* edited by Luke Parker.

This edition contains names and images of people who have died. We acknowledge that, for some people and communities, these may cause distress and sadness. Where possible, cultural permission to publish has been sought.

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# News

## A great and graceful gift

In mid-2018, we were invited by Neville Grace to view his remarkable collection of paintings. Several days later, we were shocked to hear he had died. It later transpired that Mr Grace had left his extraordinary art collection of 63 paintings to the University. Among his favourite painters were the Australian expatriate couple, Ethel Carrick and E Phillips Fox, who are represented by 27 paintings spanning subjects from North Africa, France, Venice, and Sydney. Mr Grace also enjoyed coastal landscapes; his treasures include an unusual maritime scene by the Tasmanian WB Gould, a late work



Left: Emanuel Phillips Fox, *On a French Beach* c.1909, donated by the estate of Neville H Grace, University Art Collection, UA2018.60

Below: Dr Jude Philp, artist Florence Gucheng and Anita Herle, at Erub Arts Studio, October 2018

Below left: Dr Wendy Reade

by Arthur Streeton of the Grand Canal in Venice, and a 1923 French beach scene by Roy De Maistre. In a later *Muse*, we will take a more detailed look at his gift, which will form the

core of one of the opening exhibitions in the new Chau Chak Wing Museum.

*Dr Ann Stephen, Senior Curator, University Art Collection*

## A trip to the Torres Strait

I was recently fortunate to return to the Torres Strait, a place familiar to some readers as the site of William John Macleay's 1875 Chevert expedition research.

At the administrative centre of the Strait, Thursday Island, I visited the dynamic Gab Titui Cultural Centre ([www.gabtitui.gov.au](http://www.gabtitui.gov.au)). It featured an exhibition, *Butal ina ngapa buy*, about the Islanders' pearl-lugger history and the environmental considerations of climate change. With my co-editor, Cambridge University's Anita Herle, we travelled on to consultative

meetings at Mer and Mabuiag in advance of a Sydney University Press publication of the 1888 and 1898 field journals of the zoologist-ethnographer AC Haddon.

Our final stop was at Erub (Darnley) Island, where we were guests of Erub Arts ([www.erubarts.com.au](http://www.erubarts.com.au)), a small centre with international attention after its successful installations in Monaco, Geneva, Sydney and most recently in Brisbane. This lush and bountiful volcanic island, encircled with stone fish-traps, hosted Macleay and his expedition party for two weeks in 1875, and it was a welcome



opportunity to talk with Elders about the new museum and their heritage currently in our care.

*Dr Jude Philp, Senior Curator, Macleay Museum*



## Farewell Dr Wendy Reade

We have been fortunate in benefitting from the expertise of Dr Wendy Reade, most notably in the recent conservation of two fresco-painted pavement panels from Amarna in ancient Egypt (c.1350 BC). For her efforts, she won the inaugural Australian Decorative and Fine Arts Society Mid-Career Scholarship in 2017, from the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material. Her association with the University spans 40 years; 20 of those professionally.

Dr Reade is an archaeologist and conservator with a BA (Hons) and PhD in archaeological science, and a member of teams in the Middle East, Egypt, Greece, the Balkans and Myanmar. She is President of the Near Eastern Archaeology Foundation and Honorary Associate in the Department of Archaeology. She is leaving us to be Conservation Project Manager at International Conservation Services. We wish her all the best.

*Dr Paul Donnelly, Associate Director, Content, Chau Chak Wing Museum*



# Our new museum is taking shape

Paul Donnelly gives an update on how the Chau Chak Wing Museum is progressing.

Construction on the Chau Chak Wing Museum is rapidly making an impact on the University skyline – albeit in the form of its crane, since most activity is currently taking place below ground, up to 16 metres deep on the western side opposite the Great Hall.

Hundreds of students, staff and visitors passing the hoardings that encompass the site are teased by colourful images from the museum's collections that hint this will be a building different to any other on campus. Designed by Johnson Pilton Walker (JPW) and under construction by FDC Construction NSW, the Chau Chak Wing Museum will bring together the University's Macleay and Nicholson Museums and the

University Art Gallery. In the process, it will gain a heightened profile, thereby becoming ideally poised to showcase some of Australia's most significant artistic, scientific and archaeological collections.

Construction works began in June after the official 'breaking ground' ceremony. Presided over by the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Dr Michael Spence, guests at the ceremony included the museum's major benefactor, Dr Chau. Aunty Donna Ingram gave the welcome to Gadigal country and a smoking ceremony was performed by Les Daniels.

Progress on the 7600-square-metre building was sufficiently advanced

so that it was not affected by recent severe weather events, and it remains on schedule for opening in mid-2020. An important milestone was reached in December 2018 with the pouring of the base slab. In early 2019, some of the floor levels were completed.

While the preparation of the objects, exhibitions and programs has been in development for a number of years, we have entered an exciting phase with the appointment of four contracted exhibition-design firms. The 14 opening exhibitions have been split among the companies who will work with the curators in designing the internal fit-out, including audio-visual and interactive components.

It is at this pivotal stage that the exciting opportunities provided by the larger gallery spaces in the new building become clear, and we can begin to envisage the importance of additional spaces maximising access to collections that include the three Object Studios, Schools Education Room and Auditorium. No doubt the café will also feature in some robust intellectual discussions!

**Dr Paul Donnelly is Associate Director, Content, Chau Chak Wing Museum**



## Office works

Vivienne Webb draws attention to the Sydney University Museums collections featured in the University's new Administration Building.

The new Administration Building (F23), located on the corner of Eastern Avenue and City Road, opened in August 2018. It houses approximately 500 staff across five floors and was designed by Grimshaw Architects and built by Lendlease. On display in high-profile locations throughout the building are 150 items from Sydney University Museums collections.

The display serves to connect the building, its occupants and its visitors to the contemporary and

historical activities of the University. The material is broad and eclectic, reflecting the University's range of activities including research, teaching and administration from the 1850s to the present. Elements are drawn from across the diverse collections including art, anthropology, natural history, archaeology, scientific instruments and geology, while the selection process involved curatorial and collection management staff from across the museum.

Two-dimensional works shown on the walls range from paintings to new media art and natural history. On the publicly accessible ground floor is the major three-screen video work *Heat*, by Indigenous artist Christian Thompson. On the upper level is an array of Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths).

The paintings are predominantly located on walls addressing the large sky-lit central atrium that provides internal circulation via stairs and

Opposite:  
Christian  
Thompson *Heat*,  
2010, a three-  
screen video  
work on the  
ground floor

Right: selection  
of Lepidoptera  
(butterflies and  
moths) from  
the Macleay  
collections  
on Level 5

Below left: J.W.  
Power paintings  
on Level 4

Below right:  
paintings by  
Indigenous  
artists on  
Level 5



glass lifts. The arrangement of these artworks is broadly chronological from Levels 2 to 5. Thematic groupings on each floor focus variously on 20th century regional landscapes; modernist works; a group of paintings by artist and benefactor J.W. Power, and a suite of artworks by Aboriginal artists from the Western Desert.

Three large cabinets housing object displays front onto the central space. Their contents were selected according to material, with one case of ceramics, another of metal items, and a third of glass, bone and stone objects. This criterion elicits a lateral look across the range of the University collections.

While the overall arrangement of three-dimensional material is conceptually coherent through materiality, and visually linked by symmetry, each of the 35 shelves contains a self-contained theme and explanatory label. This layout provides some dramatic juxtapositions, such as an 1850s telescope adjacent to the

beam splitter of the Sydney University Stellar Interferometer (SUSI) that was in use until 2016, or the Bronze Age storage jars situated above the Australian 1970s studio pottery.

Unusual historical and cultural perspectives abound, with Roman Empire glass sitting in proximity to laboratory glass flasks, while a marble portrait bust of a colonial British gentleman stands adjacent to millstones and axes from across Aboriginal Australia. A lump of granite, from TE Edgeworth David's expedition to the Antarctic, is flanked by a sandstone relief of a dancing apsara from Uttar Pradesh. A 17th century helmet from the period of the English Civil Wars is side-by-side with a platform balance and weights. Surrounding the museums' items are shelves containing a series of University calendars that date from the 1860s to the present, as well as a selection of PhD theses on loan from Fisher Library that profile a fascinating range of research topics across various disciplines over time.

Acknowledged strengths of the collections are well represented. These include Australian landscape paintings, Greek vases, ceramics from ongoing archaeological digs in Pella, Jordan and Cyprus, as well as historic specimens and instruments of scientific inquiry and teaching used at the University. Objects from China, India and Indonesia reflect the relatively recent focus on Asian art in the collections. Lesser-known aspects also appear, including ceramics from pre-Colombian Mexico, French and Swedish art glass, 19th century English Arts and Crafts Movement ceramics, medieval items and Italian majolica.

Overall, the generous benefaction by individuals, including the Macleay family, Sir Charles Nicholson, J.W. Power, Friends of the Nicholson Museum, Margaret Olley and Justice Roddy Meagher among others, is appropriately celebrated.

**Curator Vivienne Webb coordinated the selection of objects for the Administration Building.**

A photograph of a brick grotto, which is a small, open-sided structure made of red brick. Inside the grotto, a large, rectangular Roman sarcophagus is visible. The sarcophagus is made of light-colored stone and features some faint, circular reliefs. The grotto is situated outdoors, with a brick path leading to it. The background shows more of the brick structure and some greenery.

# What once was lost ...

Missing for nearly 120 years, the Lost Nicholson Sculptures were believed to have been destroyed in a fire. [Jamie Fraser](#) tells the story of how they were recently found.

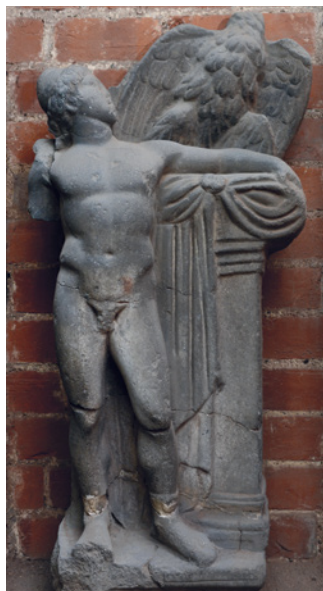
In 2016, Roman ceramicist Rosemary Jefferies attended a public reception in the grounds of Porter's Civic House at Southend-on-Sea, about an hour east of London. This handsome seaside estate was once the property of Sir Charles Nicholson (the younger), son of Sir Charles Nicholson (the elder) after whom the Nicholson Museum is named. In the mid-1930s, the younger Nicholson left the estate and its contents to the Southend-on-Sea borough council. Indeed, it was at the mayor's invitation that local resident Rosemary Jefferies attended the garden party, along with her son Bernard Arscott, a councillor serving the town.

You can imagine Rosemary's surprise when she noticed a large Roman sarcophagus in a brick grotto in the back garden. The grotto is open to the elements on one long side, and a layer of grime covers everything within. As Rosemary's eyes adjusted to the shadows, she realised the sarcophagus was not alone: several marble busts and reliefs had been built into brick niches around the walls of the grotto, or fastened to iron hooks. Councillors long-passed may have assumed these to be 19th century replicas. In actual fact, Rosemary had discovered the Lost Nicholson Sculptures.

The sculptures are a dozen Classical marble statues, busts and reliefs that were acquired by Sir George Macleay around Smyrna in Turkey in the 1870s, when he was travelling the Mediterranean on his steam yacht. While living in India, Macleay loaned the sculptures to the South Kensington Museum, forerunner of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), where Classicist Adolf Michaelis included them in his catalogue *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain* (Cambridge, 1882).

Macleay later gifted the sculptures to his friend Sir Charles Nicholson (the elder), who kept them at his Hertfordshire home 'The Grange', and who invited Charles Waldstein to publish their descriptions and photographs in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* in 1886. But there the trail runs cold. Tragically, the sculptures were lost when The Grange burned down in 1899, the lone survivor being the famous statue of Hermes that was placed outside near the duck pond. Sir Charles Nicholson (the younger) eventually moved Hermes to his own estate at Southend-on-Sea. When tidying his affairs in 1934, he and his brothers gifted the statue to the Nicholson Museum in honour of their father.

The brick grotto at Porter's Civic House, Southend-on-Sea



Rosemary Jefferies had not heard this story when she entered the brick grotto. However, when Bernard Arscott searched 'Nicholson' and 'sculptures', he discovered a webpage dedicated to the Lost Nicholson Sculptures, created by Professor Peter Stewart, Director of the Classical Art Research Centre at Oxford.

From left:  
Ganymede with eagle; grave relief with inscription XAIPE ΣΑΝΔΙΟΚΑΕ; relief with a man and a lioness.  
Images by Hans Rupprecht Goette

Fortunately, the Nicholson Museum was on Professor Stewart's mind, as he had recently received a catalogue of 16th and 17th century engravings of a Hermes statue in Rome that Friend of the Nicholson Museum Lynette Jensen had donated to Sydney University Museums in honour of Michael Turner. Professor Stewart emailed Lynette; Lynette emailed me; and so, one sunny morning in April 2018, I found myself on a train from London to Southend-on-Sea, accompanied by my friend (and Friend of the Nicholson Museum) Kate Maclean who was helping research the Nicholson Hermes for the *Connections* exhibition.

Councillor Arscott met us at the wrought iron gates of Porter's house. A young man in a dark pinstriped suit, Bernard Arscott had read theology at Cambridge and was quietly thrilled about the intellectual connections he had brought about. We walked down the drive and into a large back garden in full bloom, surrounded by high walls. With mounting excitement we entered the brick grotto and found ourselves staring at the sculptures.

We were astonished by what we saw. Unlike the Nicholson Hermes, the marbles did not escape the fire. They are rough and blackened, with heat-caused fractures and splits not evident in the 1886 photographs. Nevertheless, the

delicate carving survives: a garland sarcophagus with decorative Medusa heads; sculptural reliefs depicting an athlete and servant (*pais*), Ganymede and his eagle, a man with a lioness; a bust of Herakles; a double-headed herm. Although in desperate need of conservation, the marbles are in surprisingly robust condition. Indeed, they are a testament to Macleay's fine eye for Classical sculpture when (most likely) perusing the dealer shops in Smyrna, which served as the 19th century hub for the antiquities trade in the east Mediterranean.

After I returned from the UK, I received an email from Professor Hans Rupprecht Goette of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Berlin. Professor Goette is examining all the Classical sculptures in the Nicholson Museum to include in a catalogue, which promises to be one of the most significant publications on the Nicholson collection in recent years.

"By the way," Professor Goette asked at the bottom of his email, "do you know what ever happened to the Lost Nicholson Sculptures?" My keyboard sang as I typed this story, and so, last year, Professor Goette also visited the sculptures at Porter's Civic House. With the kind permission of the Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, he hopes to publish the Lost Sculptures as an addendum to his catalogue of sculptures in the Nicholson Museum: a fitting tribute to Nicholson's collection once split on opposite sides of the globe but connected once again. What once was lost is now found.

**Dr Jamie Fraser is Senior Curator,  
Nicholson Museum**



## Nip and tuck

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There are few specialist conservators of natural history internationally, but there are millions of museum specimens that are in need of care. Dr Jude Philp describes how natural specimens from our collection were recently restored by expert, Sasha Stollman.



Some conservation treatments for cultural objects made of skin (a pair of leather shoes or the velum page of a book), can be applied to the conservation of specimens, but there are some quite strange things about taxidermy which require specialised methods to preserve the skin on animal specimens.

In 2018, we had the good fortune to again work with conservator Sasha Stollman, who had been here a few years earlier with the 'history of taxidermy' project, funded through Sir Michael Hintze. Along with mammals needing her expertise, Sasha spent a lot of time with large fish, in particular sharks. In her treatments, she had to take into account the thin layer of stretched and painted skin and the brittle and vulnerable fins,

Top: *Carcharhinus obscurus*, dusky shark, Macleay Museum (NHF.1409)

Middle: *Isurus paucus*, mako shark, Macleay Museum (NHF.1669)

Bottom: *Pteropus tonganus*, Pacific fruit bat, Macleay Museum (NHM.226)

as well as the multitude of materials used by 19th century taxidermists: sawdust, cotton wool, paint, varnish, thread, pins, iron struts, wooden blocks, preservation chemicals and glass.

Mostly, when I picture a conservator at work, I think of a person bent over patiently inspecting something with specialist magnifier glasses and a small instrument in hand. But, in reality there's also talking over problems, investigating the literature, and detailed report writing, such as this description of a dusky shark, *Carcharhinus obscurus*, taken from Port Jackson in the 1870s:

*Taxidermy dusky shark skin over steel armature (not x-rayed). Two steel mount pins attached internally to armature protrude through underside incision. Mouth stitched partially shut through centre of upper and lower lips; upper teeth exposed; mouth interior coated with a putty. Vegetable fibre stitching secures incision running along underside from tip of nose to start of tail and up [right] side of tail. Specimen stuffed with a coarse sawdust, red ochre in colour. Some portions of gap along underside seam have been filled with an ochre coloured putty during original preparation or later as skin dried and seam opened. Good eye on [left] side is painted on. Presence of pesticides not tested.*

Sasha's description charts some of the taxidermist's work, such as stitching and stuffing, and the decisions made to show aspects of the specimen, such as teeth. Macleay's taxidermist Edward Spalding could not have foreseen the kind of skin shrinkage and movement caused by changing humidity over the next 140 years: one mako shark has become more akin to a goofy animated version of itself than the intended representation of the animal 'in life'. Dr Tony Gill, Curator, Natural History, has suggested the shrinkage causing the fins to bend may have been because the substrate is fin cartilage, which over time has dried and shrunk at a different rate to the skin. This, in conjunction with poor storage, 'animated' the shark.

Countering this damage involved some plastic, pegs, vaporised water, great care, skill and time. After initial cleaning and checks for splits in the skin, Sasha slowly humidified the affected area (enclosing the section within a bag), gently weighted sections with clamps, and then waited.



Skin shrinkage also caused stitches in the dusky shark specimen to move apart, allowing sawdust to leak out.

When needed, additional strength was provided by Japanese paper backing, held in place with ethyl cellulose. Thanks to these methods, the fins are now straighter, and the tails and gills are less precarious.

Sasha Stollman in the final stages of realigning the kingfish fins and the membrane of a bat wing

Skin shrinkage also caused stitches in the dusky shark specimen to move apart, allowing sawdust to leak out. Japanese paper could have been used here, but as our initial project had shown, taxidermy details are vital to historical research on the collections. So, when closing up gaps between the stitches, Sasha used transparent 'gold-beaters skin' (made of intestine) so the stitching can still be seen through the repair. Thus some shark specimens now have calf intestine membrane on top of their own skin, held in place with a transparent adhesive.

Nothing in the collection demonstrates better the conservator's patience in transforming a damaged specimen than the work on the Tongan fruit bat, *Pteropus tonganus*, which had many splits caused by age and handling. Aside from specialist mammal problems (ears are particularly vulnerable and often require reshaping), the process was similar to the shark treatments: gentle surface cleaning, humidifying to 'relax' specific areas, and split repair.

But, on which side of the translucent membrane of skin between each 'finger' of the bat wing should the repairs be made? Investigation was needed to understand how this bat – which has no stand or wire – was originally displayed. The position of the wings and legs would allow for the specific taxonomic details of its sex, colouring and anatomy to be apparent. Some tiny holes in the skin indicate possible exhibition pinning spots to fix the bat to the back of a case; the position of the eyes also suggests this.

Once the decision was made, the top surface of the wing was chosen for the reversible repairs. This treatment took more than two weeks of humidifying and gentle straightening, followed by more localised humidification and realignment. Lastly, the final alignment and reversible sticking of specially 'bat-wing' tinted paper could be applied.

It is incredibly exciting to see these historic specimens cleaned up and straightened out, ready for their next public appearance in the future Chau Chak Wing Museum.

**Dr Jude Philp is Senior Curator, Macleay Museum. With thanks to Sasha Stollman.**

# Preserving time

In July 2018, Sydney University Museums acquired a second luminal kinetic sculpture by Frank Hinder, *Time-Tension* (1990) which joins the *Dawson Memorial* (1968) in the University Art Collection. Chris Jones explains why keeping it preserved won't be a straightforward task.



Frank Hinder, *Time-Tension*, 1990, mixed media with electric motor, donated by Enid Hawkins in memory of Frank Hinder through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program 2018, University Art Collection, UA2018.9.1

In November 2018, Jacqueline Jordan started an internship with Sydney University Museums as part of her studies at the Grimwade Centre for Cultural Material Culture. Her intern project was to prepare an assessment of *Time-Tension*, to document the physical condition and make recommendations for the ongoing maintenance of the sculpture. Her assessment also considered the significance of the work to determine the ideal condition for display, and the importance or otherwise of the various parts and material with consideration to the artist's intentions.

*Time-Tension* physically represents Hinder's exploration of the philosophical notion of temporality and dynamic symmetry, through the use of overlaid, reflected and transmitted coloured light, representations of clocks, circular formations, and the interplay between different elements during operation. These ideas are made explicit through the poem and instructional documents that form part of the sculpture.

Like other luminal kinetic works by Hinder, *Time-Tension* is contained in a timber housing, incorporating

moving parts built from Meccano and other found materials, and the use of both reflected and transmitted light. However, *Time-Tension* is one of the few works with an entirely transparent viewing window. The others in the series are viewed through light-dispersing ribbed plastic, to create a more elusive experience. The transparent window provides visual access to the objects and materials contained within.

*Time-Tension* is constructed from a large range of materials, the kinds of things you might find in a well-stocked shed: a solid timber box with plywood

panelling painted matte black, a Perspex viewing window, aluminium angle strips, plastic diffuser sheeting, electrical tape, polarising film, mirrors, coloured theatrical lighting filter 'gels', six-pack can rings, a Baby Ben luminous clock, ping pong balls, magnets and a couple of 240-volt motors.

Such a range of materials can provide a challenge for long-term preservation. Some materials, such as aluminium, steel and wood are stable under usual museum storage and display conditions. Others, especially the plastics, are more problematic. Acrylics such as Perspex become yellow and cloudy over time due to photo-oxidation. The six-pack rings made of low-density polyethylene will become brittle. Electrical tape, made from polyvinyl chloride, may leech plasticisers onto the surface that create a sticky trap for airborne particulates and pollutants. As a luminal kinetic sculpture,

*Time-Tension* also adds movement and heat to the equation. Plastics are more susceptible to heat than wood or metal, and movement comes with the possibility of mechanical failure.

Part of Jacqueline's investigation included contacting Jeff Howard who had undertaken maintenance and restoration of the sculpture in 2016. The central motor was no longer operating; the original rigid acrylic gasket between the central motor and the spindle mechanism had degraded and crumbled, likely due to mechanical and temperature stress. Much of the adhesive tape had yellowed and failed. The neutral density filter was creased and damaged, and the central clock-face had detached. Howard's work restored the kinetic functionality and appearance of the work.

When considering how to preserve *Time-Tension*, function had to be balanced with the historical integrity

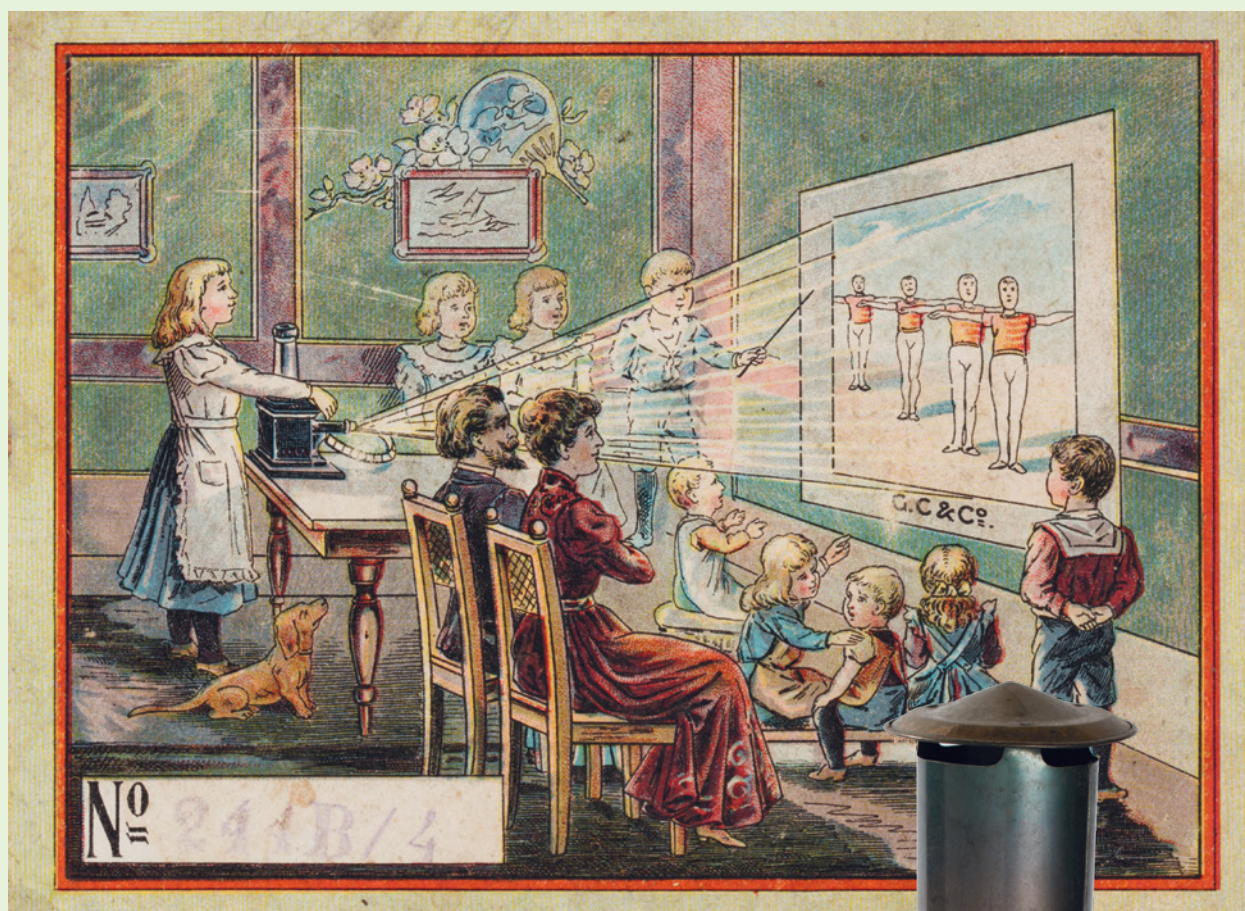
of the object to ensure appropriate conservation for research and display. The composition and function of the original material is such that deterioration is inevitable. The maintenance and functionality will likely require the reconstruction, restoration or replication of the original materials.

Using a decision-making matrix, Jacqueline has analysed the various treatment options against criteria such as material longevity, appearance, artist intent, and cost. Her report is an invaluable starting point for discussions between our conservation and curatorial staff about the future management of this wonderful sculpture.

**Chris Jones is Assistant Collections Manager, Sydney University Museums. The article was written with input from conservation intern Jacqueline Jordan.**



*Time-Tension* (details)



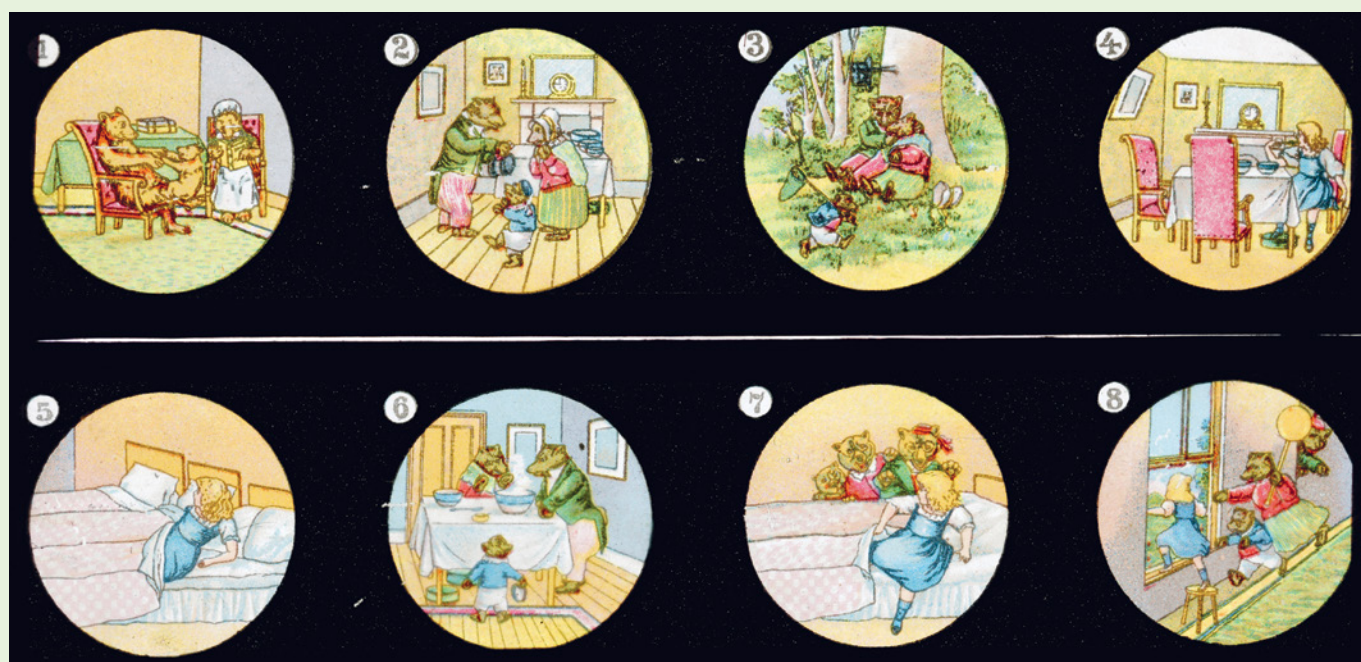
## A children's toy magic lantern

Jan Brazier transports us into times past with the discovery of a magic lantern set.

Stored in a small cardboard box, a children's toy magic lantern set takes us back to playtimes past. A miniature tin projector with its chimney top and lens tube lies ready to be assembled. Twelve thin, rectangular lantern slides (6 x 1.5 inches) are held in slots in the box, with coloured images of comic scenes and characters, pictures of animals and children at play ready to be projected. The top of a small wick lamp is also in the box (but may not be the original light source).



Above: Toy magic lantern with slide  
 Maker: George Carette & Co. Nuremberg, Germany, 1895-1915  
 donated by Pamela Hayes 1987, Macleay Museum, SC1987.12.1  
 Top: detail of the box lid, Macleay Museum, SC1987.12.3



The slide sequence showing the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, from Primus Magic Lantern slides, series VI, published by W Butcher & Sons, London, c.1900, Macleay Museum, SC1987.12.6.3

Directions for using the lantern are inside the box lid in three languages: German, French and English. The user is instructed to place the magic lantern about one to two yards from a white wall or sheet. To get a clear picture, the oil lamp needed 'a pretty large flame'. The slides were to be 'slid upside down into the lantern', then the show could begin.

Magic lanterns were optical devices that originated in the 17th century. When a light is projected through a painted transparent glass slide, placed in front of a condenser lens, the image becomes enlarged when projected onto a screen or wall. Magic lantern performances became hugely popular, both for entertainment and instruction. In Victorian times, with the rise of the middle class, magic lanterns were also used for private entertainment in the home, and some toy versions of magic lanterns were made for children.

This children's magic lantern is marked 'G C & Co N', indicating the manufacturer as George Carette & Co, Nuremberg, Germany. Nuremberg was the leading manufacturer of tin toys in the

19th century. George Carette, the son of a Parisian photographer, established a mechanical toy business in Nuremberg in 1886. He also sold magic lanterns and slides; German-made children's toy lanterns were sold around the world. Carette's business was closed in 1917 during the First World War when all German metal manufacturers were ordered to concentrate on armaments. He then returned to France.

Early magic lantern slides were hand-coloured, but with the development of mass production printing techniques, the images on the slides were printed then transferred to the glass. This was known as decalcomania transfers or chromolitho slides. Thousands were produced, with main subjects being popular children's fairytales, comic tales and stories.

Sitting with the boxed magic lantern set are three boxes of Primus Junior Lecturer Lantern Slides. Thin rectangular boxes hold lantern slides produced by W Butcher & Sons of London, who supplied magic lantern projectors and slides, advertising under the Primus trademark by 1895.

These slides would originally have come with readings. Junior lecture subjects include comical tales such as the Sweep and Whitewasher; nursery stories such as Old Mother Hubbard and Jack and the Beanstalk; portraits of the royal family; and heroic tales of Life in our Navy and Our Lifeboat men. These slides fit the Carette toy lantern.

Three mechanical slides complete the set. A moving image is created when two images slide over each other or a lever is turned. One shows fire trucks arriving at a fire, another a butcher chopping, while the third is a chromotrope slide, with its moving geometrical kaleidoscope pattern.

The lid of the box shows a picture of a family watching a magic lantern show at home. Nine children, the mother, father, and family dog are all seated to watch the projection. A girl operates the projector with a boy pointing out features. The toy magic lantern was part of many a Victorian childhood, bringing visuals to storytelling, a precursor of the cinema age.

**Jan Brazier is Curator, History, Macleay Museum**



Dale Harding, *SPINE 2* 2018, Gosford quarry sandstone, hematite, off-form concrete plinth, University Art Collection, UA2018.25.2. The commission on Eastern Avenue will soon have native grasses planted.

## Bridging the divide

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In 2018, the University commissioned artist Dale Harding to create a major new artwork spanning three sites along the City Road entrance – at the entry of the new Life, Earth and Environmental Sciences (LEES) Building, and either side of Eastern Avenue outside the Madsen and Carslaw buildings. Harding is a descendant of the Bidjara, Garingal and the Ghungalu peoples of Central Queensland. Ann Stephen spoke with the artist as he was working onsite in August.

**“I worked the plaster using my hands and a spoon. The renderers who I was working with were amused; it’s the opposite to what they do with their trowels, smoothing the wall.”**

**How have your ideas developed since you began the commission?**

Public art has not come up before as applicable for me. But this commission has been like a residency, which really supported me; so far, it’s been three weeks. It suits the way I work to be present in the discussions, and I can see the benefits in the work, shifting and refining ideas where necessary. For instance, looking at the LEES Building, I could see the architecture was very sensitive to the site and very elegant, so you can’t just impose your work on it. The dialogue about landscaping has been important, understanding the way the University’s space is used and interacted with – these are really important considerations.

**Eastern Avenue is a complex and very busy area.**

**How does your work deal with these elements?**

A key thing is the flow of the line of sight from the entrance off City Road and up and down Eastern Avenue. The form of the avenue offers compression and release. Entering from City Road, the slight elevation rising to the north allows the work to reveal itself as you move through the space. The approach mirrors for me how the Great Dividing Range has those planes before the kick-ups of the cliffs.

**So you are bringing a sense of your own country from the Carnarvon Gorge into the urban university.**

I’m certainly not looking to impose my family’s culture here, but the work is definitely an acknowledgement of the Great Dividing Range. You could walk north up the Great Divide all the way from Victoria to the Carnarvon Gorge and beyond to Grandad Bidjara country, and a bit further up to Townsville. The sandstone of my country leads all the way to Sydney via the Great Dividing Range and many of the university buildings here have been built from that sandstone. My works will make a connection between the University’s campus on Gadigal territory and the culture that my ancestors have passed on.

**Why did you place the sandstone blocks on the diagonal concrete plinth outside the Madsen Building?**

The choice of rectilinear sandstone blocks is in part a response to minimalist art. This morning I was able to stand on the site with an iPad and align the site for the plinth along the north/south axis. It has all locked into



Artist Dale Harding, during installation in late 2018, worked with stonemasons and plasterers across three sites

place really beautifully, with the two sandstone blocks sitting side-by-side with no hierarchy. There are also lines of sight almost due east to the corner of the LEES Building wall painting.

**How does the ready-made petrified tree fit within LEES Building?**

The Moreton Bay figs lining City Road are very sensitive and important to the shared thinking about the whole site and surroundings of the LEES Building that houses Environmental Sciences. The petrified tree, being formerly botanical, is a material signifier and can be read and understood through scientific or historic knowledge. There are other lines of enquiry and meanings from cultural, spiritual and philosophical understandings embedded in the relation between the living trees and the petrified log. The parts of the ancient tree trunk are laid out on a white plinth made of the same material as the space-age lab facing it.

**How have Indigenous cultural issues informed your wall painting?**

I begin with a line of inheritance in rock art, but there’s been a shift in the work. What’s occurred over the intensities of this year is that the wall paintings have become mine. I now see two parts of my life, there’s the cultural responsibility and there’s my contemporary art practice.



Dale Harding, *SPINE 3*, 2018, concrete, concrete oxide, hematite, University Art Collection, UA2018.25.3. The wall painting looks back to both the artist's ancestors' rock painting and to modernists like Mark Rothko and Robert Hunter.

As an offering to the University campus, which is multicultural, I'm going for a universal approach to the wall painting. It's not bound to the rock art of my ancestors, to cultural or community connections but more aligned to contemporary practice as I've brought different histories and new materials into my work. It's not separate from cultural practice, but it's culturally safe, in a new way. I can really stand by the work as contemporary art.

For instance, the interior wall painting at the Lees Building entrance is a departure from my previous use of locally sourced ochres. Instead, I'm using lapis lazuli as the blue pigment; vivianite, which is bluey-green; hematite, a blood-red oxide; and a pure lemon ochre from Italy, which is a commercial pigment. The paintings are literally illustrations of my breath; I use a little atomiser to blow the pigment onto the wall. I appropriated the atomiser from Sidney Nolan. Nolan had been to see the rock art at Carnarvon Gorge in 1948. He rode in on horseback and then went onto the Royal Ballet in London and appropriated rock art techniques using an atomiser spray with negative stencils to blow paint onto the costumes.

#### **What other artists have informed your work on Eastern Avenue?**

I learnt from Robert Andrew and the way he uses oxides. These are commercially produced concrete oxides, ones

he has been using for years. I was also looking a lot at this 1950s painting by Mark Rothko, in terms of building up the surface, accumulating the colour. I worked the plaster using my hands and a spoon. The renderers who I was working with were amused; it's the opposite to what they do with their trowels, smoothing the wall.

I mostly used a brush for the colour, I deliberately chose to use more or less opacity when I was mixing the paint, putting a little bit on then accumulating and building up the layers. I also used a roller. I saw the recent Robert Hunter show [at the National Gallery of Victoria, 2018] and remembered the contribution of the roller on his wall painting at Josh Milani's gallery. At that time, I was a punk undergraduate art student, and Josh asked me to assist Robert. It was brief, but I remember a lot from that experience, so thought why not use a roller here. The roller is used in patches across the Eastern Avenue wall. I was also looking at other monumentally scaled works, like Sally Gabori's painting and Gemma Smith's ceiling, both commissioned at the Queensland Law Courts. I'm looking a lot at modernism, not in the field of appropriation or reverentially, but just working with it, just doing it.

**Dr Ann Stephen is Senior Curator, University Art Collection**



## From digger to collector

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A recent donation to the Nicholson Museum  
is a treasure trove of ancient Egyptian  
artefacts. Candace Richards introduces the  
John Basil St Vincent Welch collection.

Two Australian soldiers on camels with  
Egyptian guides in front of pyramid and  
sphinx, 1914-16, donated by Sava Pinney 2014,  
Macleay Museum, HP2014.1.402

The pictures of the Australian Infantry Force and ANZACs camped below the great pyramids of Egypt or posing with the Sphinx are some of the most iconic images of Australian troops during the First World War. The sands of Egypt were the training grounds, medical camps and war-front embarkation point since the first convoy of troops arrived in December 1914.

The soldiers' experience of the sand, the heat and rapid training program were reported through family letters and regularly published in local papers (one example: "It's as hot as blazes here," according to Driver Hugh Heffer, Heliopolis, Egypt, 22 May 1915), as well as being recorded in-depth by Australia's official war correspondent Charles Bean.

Throughout the 226 notebooks amassed by Bean during his time embedded with the Australian troops, he "noticed that Australian soldiers were devoted collectors of battlefield souvenirs" (Australian War Memorial website: [www.awm.gov.au](http://www.awm.gov.au)). Of these collectors, Dr John Basil St Vincent Welch, of the 1st Field Ambulance (Egypt-Gallipoli), was one of the most devoted.

St Vincent Welch, a master's graduate from the University of Sydney Medical School, landed in Egypt with the first convoy of Australian troops. He was one of the ANZACs who landed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915, taking shrapnel to the left hand and wounded a second time in September by a bullet to the chest. He recovered in Egypt, returning to the front in November only to be evacuated with jaundice not long after. In 1916, he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and commanded the 13th Australian Field Ambulance in France, receiving the Distinguished Service Order in 1917.

During St Vincent Welch's time in Egypt, he, like many of his fellow officers and medicos, was able to take leave and enjoy the sites and



Flat-backed faience amulets depicting the four sons of Horus: Imsety, Duamutef, Qebehsenuef and Hapi, Third Intermediate Period to Roman Period (1070 BC - AD 364), Nicholson Museum, NM2017.117-120

hospitality of Cairo and Alexandria. While most soldiers returned with souvenirs of photographs and a handful of ornaments from the markets, St Vincent Welch, in addition to war memorabilia, had collected some 185 ancient Egyptian artefacts, including a cartonnage coffin fragment (NM2017.263), many amulets, scarab beetles, bronze figurines and coins, a vial of sand (NM2017.236), and even a mummified 'cat' (NM2017.262).

The St Vincent Welch collection is remarkable in both the range of material collected and its scale; no single Australian soldier is known to have collected as many artefacts during their service. The majority of items in the collection are genuine antiquities, dating from the New Kingdom through to the Greco-Roman period. However, there are at least three curious Sphinx-headed scarabs that are certainly fakes (NM2017.234). Such curios were for sale everywhere throughout the marketplaces of Cairo and Luxor. In Bean's 1915 booklet, *What to know in Egypt: A guide for Australasian soldiers*, he advises the unwitting soldier that the "little antiquities offered for sale in the streets may be genuine but are almost always a modern sham", and informs his audience that genuine relics are able to be purchased from the museum sale room.

It is possible that some of the collection, such as the Roman coins, the bronze lizard mummy container (NM2017.220), and the faience amulets of the four sons of Horus, which would have originally been sewn onto the bandages of a mummy for protection (NM2017.117-120), were purchased through the museum. However, items may also have been collected via the services of the Luxor-based Dragoman Mustapha

Abd-El Sadik, whose business card was kept among the antiquities, or from shops like the B&N Tawa Antiquities store in Alexandria, whose small sales box was also retained by St Vincent Welch.

Further research, including CT scanning of the mummified 'cat' as part of the ongoing Nicholson Museum Animal Mummy Research Project, and the x-ray fluorescence analysis of faience amulets, part of Michelle Whitford's (Macquarie University) PhD research project, will assist in determining the ancient provenance and authenticity of items throughout the collection.

St Vincent Welch returned to Sydney, and his wife Mildred in January of 1918, following further illness. He immediately reimmersed himself into his medical practice and set about fundraising for the Royal North Shore Hospital by conducting lectures across Sydney, illustrated with the many hundreds of lantern slides he had accumulated during the war, as well as his memorabilia and possibly the Egyptian artefacts. Sadly, St Vincent Welch died suddenly in 1919 from continued complications of pneumonia related to his service. His son, born shortly after, was named John Basil St Vincent Welch after his father, and followed in his father's footsteps, graduating from the University of Sydney School of Medicine, serving as a doctor during the Second World War, and collecting war memorabilia.

The entire collection of Egyptian artefacts and the box created for their display at home by the St Vincent Welch family were donated by Mrs ML (Molly) St Vincent Welch in memory of Lieutenant Colonel JB St Vincent Welch DSO (1881–1919) and Dr JB St Vincent Welch (1919–72) in 2017.

**Candace Richards is Assistant Curator, Nicholson Museum**



Cartonnage coffin fragment depicting a hawk facing the God Toth, possibly Third Intermediate Period (1070–713 BC), Nicholson Museum, NM2017.263



Mummified animal shaped with the head of a cat, unknown date, Nicholson Museum, NM2017.262

Vial of sand from the "great desert outside Luxor, between the Nile and the tombs of the kings," collected by John Basil St Vincent Welch 1914–16, Nicholson Museum, NM2017.236



Bronze lizard mummy container, Late Period (712–332 BC), Nicholson Museum, NM2017.220

# Why split a pair of earrings?



Arabella Cooper explains how a pair of earrings were reunited via new research into the Nicholson collections.

The 1933 excavations directed by William Matthew Flinders Petrie at the Middle Bronze Age site of Tell el-Ajjul, located in the modern-day Gaza Strip, produced some of the most impressive small finds of pottery and high-quality jewellery to be discovered in the region.

One of these discoveries was a non-homogeneous hoard of gold, silver and bronze jewellery, which, more than 3500 years before, had been deposited inside a pottery jar and hidden within the mudbrick walls of a house. It was one of five gold hoards that Petrie recovered from the site.

It was believed that each hoard was hidden as divine offerings or as a form of safekeeping and security, as caches ready to be melted down and recast by the owners who may have been metal dealers or local Ajjul craftsmen.

It was within this jar, among other pieces of jewellery, that the discovery

of an excellent example of Canaanite craftsmanship was made: a pair of exquisite crescent-shaped gold earrings with clustered granules.

Following the excavations at Tell el-Ajjul, the rule of division was applied to all finds discovered during the season. The division was determined by a representative from the Palestinian Antiquities Authority (under British Mandate) and by William Matthew Flinders Petrie. Two groups of artefacts were created: one group to be taken by the Palestine Antiquities Authority and sent to Jerusalem, and the other returned with Petrie to London.

This equitable division split the pair of earrings, which over time resulted in the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem obtaining one half of the pair and the Nicholson Museum acquiring the other from London in 1950. This separation

inevitably resulted in the connection between the matching pair of artefacts being forgotten over the 60 subsequent years.

Recent research for the current *Connections* exhibition rediscovered the link. Although the pair remain separated by over 14,000 km, they are now once again connected, as initially intended when they were made.

*The Connections exhibition will be on display until 2020 in the Nicholson Museum*

**Arabella Cooper is a museum studies intern and Nicholson Museum volunteer**

Top left: Gold earring in the Nicholson Museum, NM50.376

Top right: Matching gold earring from Hoard 1313 at Tell el-Ajjul, now in the Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem. 1935-3882. Photo by Yael Yolovich, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

# The duck's tale: a gem from Jericho

## Unearthing the duck

Dr Jamie Fraser, Senior Curator,  
Nicholson Museum, starts the tale.

When Nicholson Friend Dr Peta Seaton and I were working through the boxes and trays of Jericho materials in the Nicholson Museum storeroom in early 2018, we opened one of many old brown cardboard boxes and were puzzled to find a collection of ceramic sherds including a ceramic duck's head and tail. The box contained more than a hundred small sherds of a finely shaped and burnished duck-shaped vessel. The neck and handle of the vessel rose from the duck's back, and the beak served as the spout. Two circular eyes and detailed head and tail feathers were incised in the ceramic. In place of feet, the figure was originally supported on a little ring base, now missing.

This curious vessel had been made during the Canaanite Middle Bronze Age (c.2000–1550 BCE) and was used in an elite building – probably a palace – at Jericho in the West Bank. After the building was destroyed by fire, the duck-shaped vessel lay broken among the burned debris for the next 3500 years.

Sherds after  
partial  
reconstruction  
Photo: Wendy  
Reade



In the early 1950s, British archaeologist Dame Kathleen Kenyon commenced excavations around the *tell* (Arabic: small hill or mound) at the site of Jericho. In 1954, her trenches came down upon the destroyed Canaanite palace, uncovering astonishing in-situ finds including the duck-shaped vessel alongside six storage jars.

The duck is a remarkable find: Kenyon discovered only two such vessels at Jericho, and scant few other bird-shaped vessels have been discovered anywhere else. Kenyon sent one duck vessel to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, and the other to the Nicholson Museum, because the University of Sydney had part-sponsored the dig.

However, the quantity and quality of Jericho finds sent to Sydney belies more than Kenyon simply acquitting reciprocal duties to the project sponsors. Rather, her decision to send rare objects to Sydney, such as the duck-shaped vessel, or indeed the famous plastered Neolithic Jericho skull, reflects her close collegial relationship with Professor James Stewart, then curator at the Nicholson Museum. It also suggests the goodwill generated by Stewart's student Basil Hennessy, who worked as part of Kenyon's team and with whom she was particularly impressed.

Perhaps Kenyon also felt altruistic to a young colonial university that had only started teaching archaeology a few years before, in 1947. It is also possible, given the recent horrors of the Second World War, that Kenyon deliberately dispersed the materials to museums across the world to best protect them should Europe plunge itself yet again into a devastating war.

## Conserving the duck

Dr Wendy Reade, a conservator at Sydney University Museums (until December 2018), takes up the tale.

The curious duck vessel had been smashed into more than 100 pieces.

At some time, someone had started to adhere the fragments into several larger sections, but the job was never finished. The little duck vessel was long ago packed away in a brown cardboard box in the Nicholson's storeroom in Sydney, and forgotten.

My two excited colleagues had called me to the storeroom to see their new and as-yet unrevealed discovery. When I entered, they asked me in all seriousness my opinion of a tiny and unexpectedly nondescript bowl. A little puzzled, I looked at their meagre offering, and was forming a diplomatic response when they couldn't contain their glee any longer. Abandoning the tease, they produced the real prize in triumph. We laid out the little pieces of this treasure, six hands deftly holding as many pieces of the puzzle together as possible. It was nearly complete!

The box of fragments was delivered to the conservation lab where I laid out all the pieces on a clean white bench top, thinking the job of reconstruction of the already-prepared larger sections would make my job easier. But nothing's ever as easy as you think. The mended sections of the thin fine ceramic were not well joined, so they didn't fit together properly. One of the fiddly things about mending delicate three-dimensional objects is that even the slightest misalignment of one join becomes exaggerated as pieces are added, magnifying the problem. I had to take it all apart.

One trick I've learnt over the years as a conservator is that a little heat from a hairdryer can soften the adhesive of a poorly-set join and it can be manipulated into place without having to dissolve the join and start again. But this only works if the world's favourite conservation adhesive, Paraloid B72, has been used. Other formerly popular adhesives do not soften when heated in this way and so have to be completely dissolved. Unfortunately, the adhesive that had been used was not B72, so complete deconstruction of the fragile joins was the only option.

The hairdryer certainly came in handy as I methodically rebuilt the duck, piece-by-piece, from head-to-tail and around the burnished body. The ceramic had fired unevenly, leaving it mottled buff to orange to black – helpful when doing a 3D jigsaw. And there was the thrilling potter's finger mark, wiped around the junction of neck and vessel, a spellbinding connection to an individual across millennia past.

**The Jericho duck vessel is now fully restored and is on public display in the Middle East Gallery at the Nicholson Museum.**



Zoomorphic duck vessel, Canaanite, Middle Bronze Age (c.2000–1550 BCE), acquired through the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem 1954, Nicholson Museum, NM54.56.18

# A tale of two microscopes

While researching optical instruments for the Chau Chak Wing Museum, two microscopes caught Kelsey McMorrow's attention. She explains why.

Manufactured roughly 100 years apart, Mr Grubb's Sector Microscope (c.1855) and Steindorff & Co's Microbe Hunter (c.1954) are very different microscopes. However, each tells a tale of risk and experimentation.

Thomas Grubb was an Irish optician renowned for his work on large telescopes, including the Great Melbourne Telescope of 1868. The Sector Microscope was Grubb's foray into microscope design and was an attempt to improve microscopical technology. Described by Grubb himself in the *Journal of the Royal Microscopical Society* in December 1880, the Sector Microscope is remarkably robust, built with a thick, combined mahogany and brass body designed to improve the 'steadiness' of the instrument. It includes one of the earliest examples of a swinging substage and incorporates an unusual fine focus lever which, when shifted left or right, moves the stage mount up or down. While these features are novel, it is the addition of a mechanism for oblique illumination where Grubb truly experimented.

Oblique illumination is a technique where light is projected at the specimen from a sideways angle. By creating a higher contrast than direct light, it makes features in transparent



Left: Mr Grubb's Sector Microscope, Macleay Museum, SC1989.48

Right: Steindorff & Co's Microbe Hunter, Macleay Museum, SC1994.15



and semi-transparent specimens more visible. By including a prism movable along a sector (or arc) extending from beneath the stage, Grubb's Sector Microscope enables oblique illumination above and below the stage. Using the sector's graduated scale, scientists can also record the angle of the prism and thus recreate results.

Before the invention of Grubb's Sector Microscope, microscopists had to purchase additional accessories that required frequent tinkering to achieve the right lighting. Replicating the results was difficult, and a slight bump meant adjusting the set-up all over again. By adding a graduated sector to the microscope, Grubb solved these issues and enabled scientists to tweak lighting without needing to look away from the specimen.

Grubb was one of the earliest instrument makers to experiment with adding mechanisms for oblique illumination to microscopes. Unfortunately, his invention didn't take off and only four or five Sector Microscopes are known to be in existence today. Nevertheless, he was a pioneer of this technology as similar mechanisms were developed by others later in the century.

In contrast with Grubb's device, Steindorff & Co's Microbe Hunter was experimental in terms of design and marketing strategy rather than technology. In the 1950s, Steindorff & Co was recovering from the destruction of its factory during the Second World War and, with a modest staff, the company was vying for recognition against manufacturing powerhouses like Zeiss. Despite this, Steindorff took a risk, establishing a subsidiary company in the USA to distribute their microscopes. The Microbe Hunter quickly became Steindorff's bid for attention.

The Microbe Hunter was fashioned to be a microscope with all the key features of contemporary instruments but with an aesthetic design that radically diverged from the standard. The unique design features an unusual double-arm stand fabricated from one continuous piece of metal. As intended, it is a visually appealing piece, with its curved and flowing lines reminiscent of the mid-century modern movement.

If such a design was not enough to attract a potential buyer, its unusual name would. Compared to instruments with bland names like 'No. 43' or 'Student Microscope', 'Microbe Hunter' is especially dramatic. It

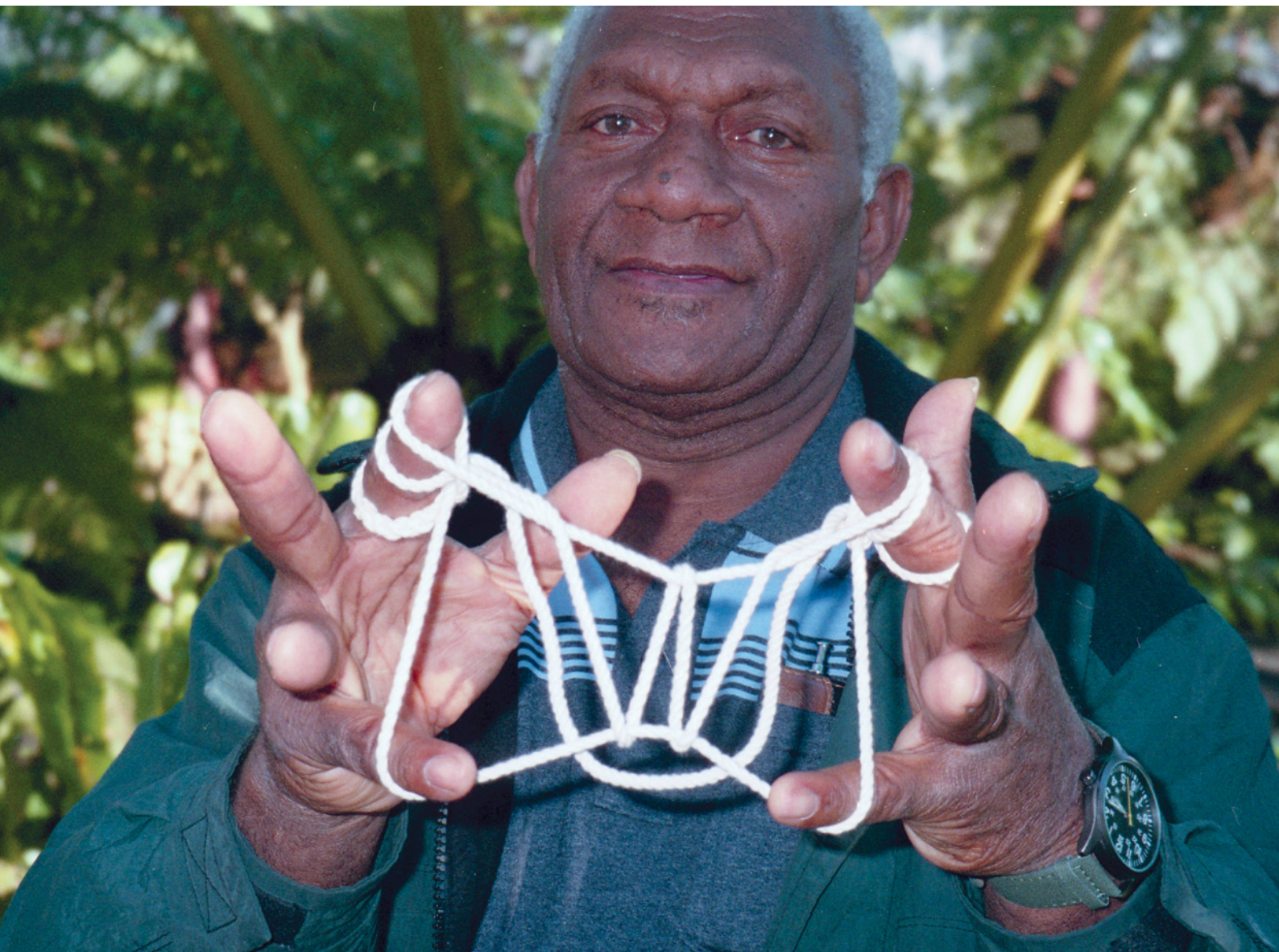
seems the name was borrowed from the 1926 classic *Microbe Hunters* by Paul de Kruif which dramatised the lives and work of scientists who studied the microscopic world. It is plausible that this was a marketing strategy by Steindorff to capitalise on the novel's popularity to boost sales in the post-war economy.

Unfortunately, like Grubb's invention, the Microbe Hunter experiment doesn't seem to have paid off. While Steindorff ultimately sold a large number of microscopes and was able to crack the United States market, this success was the result of its more classically-styled products, not the risk-taking Microbe Hunter.

There is still much to learn about these microscopes, but their stories continue to fascinate, as each design is now sought after by collectors. Both microscopes will be on display in the Chau Chak Wing Museum.

*With thanks to Martin Mach and Manuel del Cerro for their extensive research on the Microbe Hunter published in their online article "Between Glamour and Glory: the Steindorff 'Microbe Hunter'".*

**Kelsey McMorro** is Curatorial Assistant, Macleay Museum



## ***Lan n'dis ni aou\**** [Writing with string]

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Kirk Huffman introduces the ancient tradition of string figures and their associations in Vanuatu.

String figure traditions in Vanuatu are vast and varied, as befits this ancient and widespread Melanesian tradition. The basic language terms for them also differ greatly; from the Nivhaal language of southwest Tanna, where the figures are called *k'emal*, to the north Pentecost island Raga language, where they are called *rugu*, each linguistic region has its own name for string figures, and even more names for individual movements and figures.

\* The title of this article, in the language from southeast Ambrym, was kindly suggested by David Hopa, Economic Development Manager in the MSG Secretariat and the son of Vanuatu's respected former Minister of Agriculture, the late Pastor Jack Tungon Hopa (died 2015). Although the literal translation is "Using the strings", in this context he said it can also be extended to "Writing with string(s)".



1. John Kalki, son of Siliau, with 'si lewan' no 'kewan' showing *nemelük* [wild kava]. Lawa village, South West Bay, Malakula. November 1985. Photo courtesy Vanuatu Cultural Centre.

2. Two-person string figure interplay by children from the family of the late famous sculptor Chief Willy Taso. Wuro village, Craig Cove, west Ambrym. A few kilometres away along the northern coast, the general term for string figures is *tu ne rawo'h*: a variant of this term would be used in the Craig Cove area. March 1981. Photo courtesy Vanuatu Cultural Centre.

3. Selin Lingai of Yakel, southwest Tanna, the great-granddaughter of the famous late Chief Kowia, shows *k'emal* of *yang'en'teh*, a string figure for the Cardinal honeyeater *Myzomela cardinalis* or 'redhed' in Bislama. October 2016.

4. JJ Nakou of Yaonanen and Yakel, southwest Tanna, shows *k'emal* named *tana mene neyae*, [earth and sky]. September 2016.

Left: Olfala Donald Mael Torok of Liro, Paama, shows the *aitis* of *eisasa onen meiao* [nest of the meiao]. *Meiao* is the rare and culturally significant *Megapodius layardi*. Called 'Namalao' in the national language Bislama, this bush turkey burrows its nest in warm earth and rotten wood. July 2016.

String figures have a multitude of uses and levels of connection and meaning. The string itself is generally 50 cm or more in length, tied to form a circle, and made from pandanus or particular vines. From this basic starting point, multiple interwoven patterns can be formed through the complex manipulation of string and fingers. At the most basic level, these figures are playthings, such as those *kāku* produced by Big Nambas children on Malakula, made with the plentiful split pandanus available from their mothers' weaving of valuable *nahei* mats. These basic *kāku* figures portray houses, animals, plants, and other daily things. On Futuna, children were taught string figures during the five to 10-day funerary mourning ceremonies that brought families together. The Futunese phrase "Hey, do you want someone to die?" is sometimes said when a child is too busy with *h'ta* [making string figures].

Figures can also be made to accompany a children's story, song, or a 'teaching'. Such figures are usually done by one person, sometimes two, but in Southwest

Malakula there exists a rare form where four persons, joined together in song and movement, create particular figures. Adults also use them as a memory aid, sometimes as an integral story/song guide or addition to a story. Some of them, particularly certain risqué ones, can even have 'moving parts'. Further complexities can lead into more sacred levels of this multifunctional fine art, representations linked to bark-cloth designs and political commentary (as on Erromango), body tattoos (as on Maewo), mat designs (as on Ambae) and sacred stones and roads to the World of the Dead (as on Malakula).

They can also be a way of 'talking' when actual talking is forbidden or dangerous. In 19th century Erromango, a situation arose when a band of sandalwood traders from Australia were one day pressuring some Erromangans to give them yams, in short supply at the time. The chief quickly made the *tawo'h* (figure) for yam upside-down, so that the women would know to answer 'no'. An extra *tawo'h* (twist) could have indicated "give them just rubbish yams".



At the most basic level, these figures are playthings ... Adults also use them as a memory aid, sometimes as an integral story/song guide or addition to a story.

Making these intricate figures from a young age is thought to be good physical and mental exercise for the fingers, hands, wrists and mind. As the respected elderly teacher Donald Mael Torok of Liro, Paama, said (in his language), in July 2016: "*Aitis kilea vaeisenuk ale kilea vaesakem hem pame la la ka rendemien onom vom.*" ["String figures can teach you, can make your hands and fingers light, and can teach your thinking to work good and long."]

But because string figures are sometimes wrongly considered as just children's games, they can be among the first things to go in the wake of 'development'. Like the proverbial 'canary in the coal mine', when these figures begin to disappear, one knows that serious cultural loss is beginning. The rapid expansion of mobile phones in Vanuatu since 2008 has created a 'heads down' generation, obsessed with this useful but addictive technology which is not driven by *kastom* and cultural knowledge.

Early last year, Bruce Kuautonga, from Futuna, lamented the fact that many young people didn't even know their language name for string figures. "People of our age [mid-30s]", he said "are possibly the lucky ones. We were brought up properly, so we learnt and still know a lot of our traditional names. Those who have been brought up in the age of mobile phones often hardly learn anything. They just hang on to their phones and don't listen to anyone who knows anything." (Translated from Bislama.)

String figures are an important part of Vanuatu's complex cultural mix. This short, incomplete article is written to try and help raise awareness of the importance of these wonderful intangible traditions.

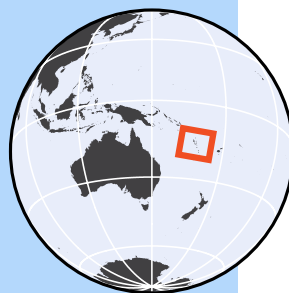
**Kirk Huffman is Honorary Curator, National Museum, Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Port Vila; Honorary Associate, Sydney University Museums, and a Member, Scientific Committee, Museum of Tahiti and the Islands, Puna'auia, Tahiti, French Polynesia.**

Left: Chief Uminduru Jerry Taki of U(m)ponilongi, south Erromango, shows the final *tawo'h* of the lengthy string figure story about the introduction of Christianity to Erromango. The upside-down pyramid represents an upturned *nevsem* tower, the major symbol of traditional social structure. The shape inside the *nevsem*, the *nep*, is "the teaching area of *kastom*", which has been denigrated and turned upside down by Christianity and 'education'. March 2013

Above: Selin making the *k'emal* of *kamsui*, dragonfly, nicknamed '*helikopta*' in Bislama. October 2016.

All photographs in this story by Kirk Huffman.

# String figure traditions in Vanuatu



South  
Pacific  
Ocean

This article is dedicated to the spirits of the following recently-deceased Ni-Vanuatu (the date they died is shown in brackets):

- Chief Jacob Kapere of Imaki, SE Tanna (1.6.17)
- Father Luke Dini of Ra, Mota Lava (9.6.17)
- Veta Tenkon (VKS Young Peoples Project cameraman, tragically killed near Cairns 23.6.17)
- Kaindum Sarakamel Batikli of Mūn, SW Malakula (15.7.17)
- Mweleun [abbreviated here to respect kinship prohibition] nambymb Kapat of Lenda(m) boë/Melken, south-central Malakula (1.1.18)
- Tou Donald of Liro, Paama (January 2018)
- M'lin tarap Kalman Hapsai of Brenwei/Ondowalo, NW Malakula (18.1.18)
- Joel Malessy of Wala, NE Malakula. Film maker (22.12.18)
- Mungau Daïn, Yakel, SW Tanna. Actor (5.1.19)
- Lisiel Rantes of SW Bay, Malakula. VKS Fieldworker (7.1.19)

**Thanks to:** Eric Natuoivi and Bruce Kuautonga (Futuna); JJ Nakou, Lingai and daughter Selin (southwest Tanna); Chief Uminduru Jerry Taki (Erromango); Donald Mael Torok and Donald Pelam (Paama); David Hopa and James Hanghang Tainmal (Ambrym); Godwin Ligo (Pentecost); Renata Netaf and father James Gwero (Ambae); Kamanlyklawan, Longdal Nobel Masingyao, Chief Alben Reuben, Kaitip Kami, John Kalki, Ambong Thompson, Marcellin Abong, Dickens Dick, Gregoire Nimbtik (Malakula). Thanks also to Maribel Morales Rosales who did the photo scans.

**Further reading:** Huffman, K, 'Suh tuh netan 'monbwei: we write on the ground: sand-drawings and their associations in northern Vanuatu', in Bonnemaison, J. et al, *Arts of Vanuatu*, Bathurst & Honolulu, 1996, pp. 247–53.

Where	Language	String figure name
Futuna	Fesao Futuna	<i>Bure (H'ta bure to make one)</i>
Southwest Tanna	Nivhaal	<i>K'emal</i>
Erromango	Sié	<i>Tawo'h</i>
Paama	Selusien tenout Voum	<i>Aitis</i>
Southeast Ambrym	South East Ambrym	<i>Lan n'dis ni aou (the action)</i>
North Ambrym	Féan	<i>Tu ne rawo'h</i>
Tomman, southwest Malakula	Nahai language	<i>Nilik'seu/Nilik t'su</i>
South West Bay, Malakula	Ninde language	<i>Si lewan ka(n)go</i>
Big Nambas, northwest Malakula	V'ënen Taut language	<i>Kāku</i>
North Pentecost	Raga language	<i>Rugu</i>
West Ambae	West Ambae	<i>Hihi(m)bia</i> (if being done by one person, <i>Lai lai hihi(m)bia</i> if being done by more than one)
North West Santo (Nogugu area)	Nokuku	<i>T'suguta</i>

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# Making history

## Yolngu community visit

In November 2018, the University hosted a group of Yolngu visitors undertaking consultation on an exhibition that will form part of the opening displays in the new Chau Chak Wing Museum. *Gululu dhuwala Djalkiri: welcome to the foundations* will showcase the University's extensive Yolngu art and cultural heritage collections.



1. Joe Dhamanydji and Raymond Bulambula, artists and representatives of Milingimbi Art & Culture, in the Museums storerooms. Dhamanydji holds a painting featuring a Niwuda - guku (native honey bee) design by his Daygurrurr Gupapuyngu clansman, Joe Djembungu.

2. Yalpi Yunupingu and Wanyubi Marika direct curator Matt Poll in the placement of works for the exhibition. The curators Rebecca Conway and Matt Poll see Yolngu philosophies as the driver for the design of the exhibition and are working closely with three art centres of Yirrkalala, Milingimbi and Ramining.

3. Moira Saunders, Associate Director Development, David Ellis, Director, Museums and Cultural Engagement, Djon Mundine OAM, an independent curator, and artist and arts worker, Tolbert Dharramanba, from Bula'bula Arts, Ramining at an Alumni and Development morning tea.

4. Beat Knoblauch, Wanyubi Marika and Yalpi Yunupingu discuss Yolngu art and the work of the Yirrkalala-based, Buku-Larrngay Mulka Centre.

All photos by David James.



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# Find your muse at Sydney University Museums

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For more information and to view the latest timetable, visit [sydney.edu.au/museums](http://sydney.edu.au/museums) and click on 'What's on'. Unless otherwise stated, all events take place at the Nicholson Museum.

## Free Nicholson Museum tours

Regular free tours of the Nicholson Museum take place 3.30–4.30pm each Monday afternoon.



## March

**Saturday 2 March, 2–3pm\***

### **Sardinia and Corsica in the post-classical era**

Robert Veel, Academy Travel  
Following his lecture on prehistoric and Roman Sardinia in 2018, Robert Veel surveys these two Mediterranean islands from the Dark Ages to the dawn of the modern era.  
Cost: free  
*Travellers in Time* series

**Wednesday 13 March, 6 for 6.30pm**  
**Walter Beasley, James Stewart & the Nicholson Museum**

Dr Christopher Davey, Australian Institute of Archaeology  
Cost: \$40, \$30 for Friends of the Nicholson Museum, \$10 for students

**Monday 25 March, 11am–12 noon**

### **Free Indigenous heritage tour**

Join Koori guide Jimmy Smith as he leads us across the campus, exploring the remarkable Indigenous history of the location and stories of the University's historic relationship with community.  
Bookings:  
[museum.education@sydney.edu.au](mailto:museum.education@sydney.edu.au)

**Wednesday 27 March, 6pm**

### **G-force and Sydney's secret wartime research**

Dr Peter Hobbins, Department of History, the University of Sydney  
Cost: free

## April

**Wednesday 3 April, 6pm**

### **Seeing stars with SUSI**

Associate Professor John O'Byrne, Sydney Institute for Astronomy

**Saturday 6 April, 2–3pm\***

### **Travellers to Greece**

Helen Nicholson  
Cost: free  
*Travellers in Time* series

**Saturday 6 April, 3–4pm**

### **Curator's Tour of the Greek collections**

Candace Richards, Nicholson Museum, leads us on an exploration of the Greek objects of the collection.  
Cost: free

**Monday 8 April, 3.30–4.30pm**

### **Greek language tour of the Greek and Cypriot collections**

Anthoulla Vassiliades leads a tour of the Nicholson Museum in Greek for the Sydney Greek Festival.  
Cost: free

**Wednesday 10 April, 11am–12pm**

### **Free modernist art walking tour**

Join us for a free walking tour of modernist public art on campus with your guide Alan Spackman.  
Bookings:  
[museums.education@sydney.edu.au](mailto:museums.education@sydney.edu.au)

## Current exhibitions

### Nicholson Museum

- *Connections*
- *The sky and the sea: ancient Cypriot art*
- *Lego Pompeii*
- *Death Magic*
- *Memento: remembering Roman lives*
- *Tombs Tells and Temples: excavating the Near East*
- *Actors, Athletes and Academics: life in ancient Greece*
- *The Art of Storytelling*

Unless noted, all Nicholson Museum exhibitions are ongoing.

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All details are correct at the time of publication, however, events may change due to circumstances beyond our control. Please visit our website for up-to-date information: [sydney.edu.au/museums](https://sydney.edu.au/museums)

If you wish to contact the Macleay Museum, the Nicholson Museum or the University Art Gallery, please see inside front cover for our details.

## May

### Wednesday 10 April, 6 for 6.30pm Classics in the 21st Century:

#### A Panel Discussion

Staff from the University of Sydney's Department of Classics and Ancient History discuss the importance of classics in the modern world: from publishing sensations to combating the rise of the alt-right.

Cost: \$40, \$30 for Friends of the Nicholson Museum, \$10 for students

### Tuesday 16 April, 10am–12pm

#### Myths become alive:

#### A children's workshop

A free children's workshop with arts and craft and reading with children's author Stella Sorotou (Sydney Greek Festival).

Cost: free

### Thursday 18 April, 10am–4pm

#### School Holiday Activity Day:

#### Ancient Greek myths

A fun children's activity day where we explore ancient Greek mythology and meet the gods and goddess of Mt Olympus.

Cost: free

### Monday 29 April, 3.30–4.30pm

#### Curator's Tour of the Cypriot collections

Dr Craig Barker leads us on an exploration of ancient objects from Cyprus in the collection.

Cost: free

Right: Paddy Lipawana, *Gurdurrku (BroLga)*, c.1984, ochre and synthetic polymer on wood, J.W. Power collection, the University of Sydney, managed by the Museum of Contemporary Art, PW1984.111

Above: Capacitive galvanometer, c.1950s, transferred from the School of Electrical and Information Engineering, the University of Sydney, 2018, Macleay Museum, SC2018.41

### Wednesday 1 May, 12–1pm

#### Artist Talk: Dale Harding

Join Dale Harding as he talks about the new public artwork *SPINE* located on Eastern Avenue.

Cost: free

### Saturday 4 May, 2–3pm\*

#### The Colonisation of Vanuatu

Dr James Flexner, Department of Archaeology, the University of Sydney  
*Travellers in Time* series

### Wednesday 8 May, 6 for 6.30pm

#### Iceland/Sagaland

Richard Fidler and Kari Gislason  
Cost: \$40, \$30 for Friends of the Nicholson Museum, \$10 for students

## June

### Saturday 1 June, 2–3pm\*

#### Travelling Imperial Russia with N.N. Miklouho-Maclay

Dr Elena Govor  
*Travellers in Time* series

### Wednesday 19 June, 6 for 6.30pm

#### The Triumph Metamorphosed: the transformation of a Roman Spectacle

Dr Dugald McLellan, Department of Italian Studies, the University of Sydney  
Cost: \$40, \$30 for Friends of the Nicholson Museum, \$10 for students

\* The 2019 *Travellers in Time* free Saturday lecture series is sponsored by Academy Travel.

# Connections

*Connections* explores how certain objects in the collections are intimately connected to objects held by museums overseas. By examining these links, we learn more about the objects themselves and the circumstances that caused them to rest eventually on opposite sides of the globe.

## Current exhibition

### Nicholson Museum



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