

# Joe Burke's Legacy: the History of Art History in Melbourne

Ben Thomas

The decision by the University of Melbourne to appoint Joe Burke as the *Herald* Chair of Fine Arts in 1946, and establish Australia's first Department of Art History at the University of Melbourne, was prescient. Twenty years in advance of other Australian Universities, their foundation owed much to the foresight of Daryl Lindsay, the Director of the National Gallery of Victoria; funding from Sir Keith Murdoch, editor of the *Herald & Weekly Times* and patron of the arts; and support from John Medley, the Vice-Chancellor.

The Department included academics from a wide range of backgrounds, many of them refugees from Nazi Europe. Burke, a young British art historian, arrived out of post-war British austerity and looked to Australia for a new and brighter future. With his Department, Burke introduced to Melbourne a rich and varied approach to art history, grounded in the Germanic tradition.

In support of the current exhibition at the Baillieu Library, Ben Thomas will discuss the founding of the Chair of Fine Arts, and the continuing legacy of Joseph Bourke and the Department of Art History.

*Ben Thomas is an art history doctoral candidate with the School of Culture & Communication, University of Melbourne. His dissertation is a biographical-analytical study of the Australian artist and well-known art administrator, Sir Daryl Lindsay (1889–1976). He has previously undertaken a BA (Hons) and a Masters of Museum and Gallery Curatorship at the University, and is an Honorary Associate of Museum Victoria.*

**1–2pm, 4 March 2008, Leigh Scott Room, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Baillieu Library,  
University of Melbourne**

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**HERE THIS AFTERNOON** to take up his Melbourne University appointment to The Herald Chair of Fine Arts, Professor Joseph T. Burke, with his wife and their son, Rickard, were photographed at Spencer Street on arrival from Sydney.