

# 2011 Cultural Collections Projects Program

This year many students and volunteers have taken up the unique opportunity of working with the University's cultural collections. All have come from varied backgrounds and experiences, and it is this diversity that they bring with them to the projects. It is not possible to know what makes the ideal match between participant and project, but several times this year I have been fortunate to see this 'magic' happen. When it does, a project goes from being an enjoyable experience (always the minimum we aim for!) to an immensely satisfying engagement which may change the way the volunteer looks at the world, the career path they are planning, or simply ignite an interest in an area previously unknown to them. It is extremely rewarding when this 'magic' happens and the inherent value of these cultural collections extends far beyond their obvious worth.

## Projects, students and volunteers...

Thirty five students/volunteers representing 5 tertiary institutions and 14 different courses from Masters of Art Curatorship and Bachelor of Music students at Melbourne, though to Masters of Information Management students at Charles Sturt University and Public History students at Monash, have worked with the collections this year. Non student volunteers have also come from a broad range of backgrounds and include retired chemistry professors, food scientists, business professionals, academics and librarians. With such an interesting mix of volunteers working with the cultural collections – it is not surprising that excellent results have been achieved.

**Bing Cheng Chai** has a background in food science and wanted to give something back to the University after having enjoyed studying here in previous years. He undertook a volunteer project with the Physics Museum where he has been researching items within the collection to go onto the museum's electronic catalogue.

The Baillieu Library Print Collection was in high demand this year, with five volunteers working with its collections. **Rebecca Edwards** studying her Masters in Art History (Melbourne) worked on expanding the narratives section of the EMu (Electronic Museum) database by completing research on various artists represented in the collection and then compiling their biographies. This research was then uploaded onto the online database. **Viona Fung** studying for her Masters in Art Curatorship (Melbourne) continued her narratives project work started last year with the collection. **Jade Mahoney**, who was completing her Post Graduate Diploma of Arts Management (Melbourne), catalogued prints in the collection. Through her placement she really enjoyed the detective work involved in researching lesser known aspects of the collection for the catalogue and also assisting Prints Curator Kerriane Stone in day to day related collection management activities. **Stephanie Sacco** studying for her Masters in Art Curatorship (Melbourne) catalogued works in the John L Berry Architecture Collection. Another Masters in Art Curatorship graduate **Romina Sgro**, has recently commenced a placement with the Print collection

and will be working as a catalogue assistant building on the great progress made by Stephanie.

The University's science and medical collections were well represented in projects this year with several students working with these fascinating collections. **Alexandra Gerner** studying for her Masters in Public History (Monash) researched the papier-mâché anatomical models in the Harry Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology. Another project at the Museum saw **Siranne Hose**, Museums Studies (Deakin) pursue her interest in military history by researching the provenance of a small collection of World War I specimens held by the museum. Using the limited amount of information available, Siranne set out to establish the background, history and origins of this collection.



Lucy Watson in the Dental Museum

Seven volunteers have worked with Special Collections this year. **Dali Abrahams** studying for her Masters of Information Studies (Charles Sturt University) undertook her professional placement subject working with the Stanislaus Ostoja-Kotkowski albums. Ostoja-Kotkowski was one of the first artists to work with laser, sound and image production, and for the project, Dali listed and researched this internationally significant collection of albums. **Anna Heyward** a Bachelor of Arts student (Melbourne) has been working on a research and rehousing project with the collection of Meanjin linocut printing blocks that were used to illustrate editions of the literary journal in the 1960s.



Emma Neale and Natasha Trenear rolling a banner at UMA

The McLaren Collection within Special Collections has also benefited from volunteer involvement. **Vikki Nemeth** (Bachelor of Applied Science) and **Penny Roberts** (Master of Information Studies) both at Charles Sturt University worked their way through a selection of material from this collection as part of a rehousing and listing project. **Thomas Vranken** studying for his Bachelor of Arts (English Literature) at Melbourne has also been working closely with Special Collections on several rehousing and listing projects. Still in Special Collections but this time in the cataloguing area, **Anna Rotar** Masters of Information Management (RMIT), has been working with expert cataloguers and enjoying an insight into this specialised area. **Anna Bagshaw** based in Queensland and studying her Masters of Information Management (Charles Sturt University) recently spent a week in Melbourne getting acquainted with the Medical Rare Book Collection. She is currently completing a significance assessment on this collection of approximately 1,850 volumes that cover subjects that constitute the history of western medicine. On the other side of the campus, **Ben Thomas** is undertaking a significance assessment on the Elisabeth Murdoch Slide Library. Ben, who had previously been researching the collections held in the Slide Library, is an ideal candidate to apply the significance assessment methodology to his existing knowledge.

**Piri Jakab** a Bachelor of Music student (Melbourne) worked on a preventative conservation and research project of a 19<sup>th</sup> century scrapbook album housed within the Rare Materials Collection of the Louise Hanson-Dyer Music Library. The album contains programs for concerts held in Melbourne and their associated press reviews from 1886 to 1916 and provides a rich resource of historical material. After training in the process, Piri brush vacuumed and interleaved the fragile album. Further, she created an index and photographed each page to ensure that the unique historical information it contained was preserved and accessible.

The University of Melbourne Archives (UMA) also benefitted from volunteer involvement this year. **Bob Appleyard** continued with his project commenced in 2010, applying his knowledge of the mining sector to an archival documentation project. Meanwhile, **Barbary Clarke** and **Ardy Tibby** have also continued with their ongoing documentation work with the Victorian Women's Liberation and Lesbian Feminist Archive. **Rhonda Day**, **Victoria Triggs** and **Fiona Wiseman** have been volunteering on the La Mama Theatre Collection where they have been working to list the collection. **Alexandra Taylor** (RMIT, Bachelor of Business) assisted with appraisal and research for project proposals for RB Ritchie & McPherson's Limited. **Jessica Kilpatrick**, a student studying her Masters in Information Management (Monash University), recently commenced an archival documentation project at UMA working with the Lindsay Tanner papers. For the project Jessica will help appraise, list and document the existing arrangement of the records and create a consolidated finding aid for the collection. **Moyra McAllister** has continued work on a project that she commenced last year, working with a selection of early UMA files from the business collections to identify and prepare details for the new database that relate to acquisition, ownership and access conditions. Also at Archives, **Emma Neale** completing her Bachelor of Arts (Melbourne) and **Natasha Trenear** completing her Masters of Cultural Material Conservation (Melbourne) worked together on a textile rehousing project with the large scale banners from various Trade Unions and the Victorian Women's Liberation & Lesbian Feminist Archives. For the project they recorded all information on the banners and then photographed, labelled and rolled them to meet conservation standards.



Piri Jakab brush vacuums the 19<sup>th</sup> century scrapbook

**Emma Neale** has also worked on an additional project during the year with the Bredahl Moss Collection

which is housed in the Herbarium. For the project she was involved in the conservation re-housing of the specimens which date from c.1880-1900. Quite a contrast in scale of objects between the Archives and Herbarium's collections for Emma! Also working on the Breidahl Moss Collection, albeit from a different angle, was recent Monash University History graduate **Angelika Nikolov-Arvela**. For her project, Angelika researched the history of the Breidahl Moss Collection about which little was known. Thanks to Angelika's excellent research skills, we now have a more comprehensive picture of donor H.T.W Breidahl.

Also In the area of research, **Trevor McAllister**, has continued his exploration of a selection of objects from the School of Chemistry's Historical Collection. This research will be included in a web-based exhibition that will showcase the collection and the Chemistry School's history. Trevor has also written an article on the collection for an upcoming edition of the *Collections* magazine.

Several student projects have engaged with the collections at the Ian Potter Museum of Art this year. **Zoe Morrison** studying for her Bachelor of Arts/Diploma of Languages (Melbourne) and **Beau Emmett** worked with the Gerard Herbst Poster Collection where they catalogued and conservation flattened posters from this fascinating collection of 20<sup>th</sup> century international graphic art. Also at the Potter, **Isabelle Waters-Lynch** completing her Masters of Cultural Material Conservation has been working on a project with the

Leonhard Adam Collection of International Indigenous Culture. For the project she has assisted in the transfer of images of objects in the collection from transparencies to digital images and then attached these to the electronic catalogue.

Lastly, **Lucy Watson**, Bachelor of Arts (Melbourne) worked with the collections at the Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum as a cataloguing assistant. For her project she worked with models and appliances for jaws made during the First World War which comprise the Major Kenneth Russell collection. The project involved the completion of manual catalogue worksheets for collection items yet to be documented and the updating and expansion of existing catalogue records.



Stephanie Sacco working with the Print Collection

## International Student Exchange Program

Earlier in the year, Emily Wubben the first Melbourne recipient of the *International Student Projects Program: Museums and Collections Award* braved freezing conditions in the United Kingdom to embark on a collections focused stay at the University of Birmingham. The Award, supported by the University Library and the U21 network, was developed between the universities of Melbourne and Birmingham with the purpose of facilitating an international exchange. Successful recipients have the opportunity to spend one month working on various aspects of museum and collection-based work hosted by the partner university. Below, Emily reflects on her time spent at the University of Birmingham.

### **My enriching experience: the Museums and Collections Award 2011**

*I am an Art History Honours student and in January, this award, took me on a one month expenses paid student exchange to the University of Birmingham, to gain experience with the University's numerous collections. I worked across a broad range of collections including the Research and Cultural Collections, Lapworth Museum of Geology, the Barber Institute of Fine Art, Special Collections, VISTA 3D Imaging Laboratory, Wilson Conservation Studio and Winterbourne House and Gardens. My project tasks included research, interpretation, documentation, cataloguing, 3D imaging, a paper conservation project, participation in student education workshops in the Barber, as well as devising my own workshop for the Barber Education Department.*

*One particular highlight of the exchange program was learning about the technology in the VISTA Laboratory. I was previously unaware of the developments that have been made in 3D imaging and also the applications to which it can be used, including geological and building surveys, as well as the analysis of paintings. Consequently, the chance to work with VISTA was most valuable in broadening my knowledge of this field. I relished the chance to gain practical experience with the equipment used in the Laboratory by creating my own 3D image of a statue from the University's Danford collection of West African Art and Artefacts. The resolution of the images I could capture using one of their high-tech Minolta scanners was truly enthralling and a pleasure to view.*

*I also thoroughly enjoyed my work with the Wilson Conservation Studio, where I was documenting and surface cleaning early twentieth-century pencil, ink and watercolour designs of stained glass windows by the company John Hardman and Co. This project increased my appreciation of and curiosity in the art of stained glass. Furthermore, it also enhanced my understanding of the processes and equipment used in paper conservation. Overall, I felt very privileged to be able to work with such beautiful artworks and to be involved in their care and management. As a result of my Art History studies, I especially felt 'at home' in the Barber Institute of Fine Art, which is one of the finest small art galleries in Europe. During my time with the Barber's Education Department, I devised an education workshop for high school students between the ages of fourteen to sixteen. The workshop I created addressed the themes of identity and citizenship with respect to several artworks in the Barber's magnificent collection.*

*A further highlight from my placement was the cabinet display I created for the Lapworth Museum of Geology. In this project, I was given complete freedom in the curatorial process to select and discuss items that spoke to my personal interests. Consequently, I took this opportunity to create a display that was inspired by my Australian nationality and my study of art history. My intention was to provide my audience at the University of Birmingham with a different perspective on their significant and intriguing collection.*



Emily Wubben with her exhibition at the Lapworth Museum

*During my placement at the University of Birmingham, I was interested to observe the similarities shared between the diverse collections in terms of their management. This program therefore broadened my knowledge and appreciation of the tasks and responsibilities experienced by public cultural institutions in general. I believe this understanding will be most relevant and advantageous to my studies, as I am currently working towards a future career in Art Curatorship.*

*As well as my fascinating projects at the University of Birmingham, the program also provided me with the chance to explore other cultural institutions in England. I arranged a weekend trip to London with my friend Katy Wade, who was the corresponding recipient of the Museums and Collections Award for the University of Birmingham. We made use of our valuable time in London to visit the National Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, Tate Britain, Tate Modern and the British Museum. I also went on a day trip to Liverpool and Manchester to explore the cultural institutions of these two cities. Consequently, this program enabled me to explore world-renowned museums that I had always hoped to visit.*

*This student exchange has been a fantastic experience and I am most thankful to have been awarded this opportunity. The connections I have made with professionals in the museum sector while I was in Birmingham are certainly invaluable and I hope to retain these contacts into the future. Additionally, I now have a practical, firsthand appreciation of the ongoing tasks that are involved in this field of work. Furthermore, the student exchange gave me the chance to think beyond my immediate environment of the University of Melbourne and directly consider collections and collections management in a wider, international context. In summary, I could not have wished for a more enriching and insightful experience.*

**Emily Wubben**, February 2011

Thanks to the success of the pilot year of the exchange and the generosity of the University Library and the U21 network, we were able to secure funding to offer this wonderful opportunity to Melbourne and Birmingham students again this year. The *Museums and Collections Award* was advertised in September, and Emma Neale in her third year of a Bachelor of Arts degree (majoring in Art History, Screen and Cultural Studies), was chosen from an impressive field of applicants. Emma will be travelling to the University of Birmingham in mid January 2012 and we are looking forward to welcoming a Birmingham student to Melbourne in July of next year.

## **Wrap up....**

It is a great pleasure to see the students, volunteers and collections all benefit so richly from the close interaction that this Program brings. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the collection managers and staff who work closely with the students and volunteers of this Program and who enable this rich exchange to happen on a daily basis. And of course a big thank you must go out to the students and volunteers who have worked with the University's collections throughout the year, as your contribution has helped ensure that these wonderful collections remain relevant, appreciated, preserved and accessible.

Have a wonderful Christmas and happy New Year.

Helen Arnoldi  
Cultural Collections Projects Coordinator  
December 2011