

Introduction

Alex Chernov



Cultural collections are essentially about people. Although made up of inanimate substances such as paper, leather, clay, canvas, dried plants, photographic film and the like, collections embody the thoughts, memories, personalities, biographies and relationships of human beings past and present. This issue of *University of Melbourne Collections* vividly illustrates the point. Take these examples:

- Dr Ray Marginson's recollections of the forming of the University's collections tell us so much about the author's career as Vice-Principal, his active support for the preservation of our visual and architectural heritage, and his appreciation of their importance in the life of students, staff and the wider community. His article also provides glimpses into the motivations of benefactors and the idiosyncrasies of some artists, and demonstrates how the vision and determination of individuals and small teams can bring about major and lasting improvements.
- From Dr Vivien Gaston's discussion of portraits by the late Louis Kahan, we learn about the artist himself and how his eventful life contributed to his skill and

facility as a portraitist. The drawings themselves shed new light on the personalities of the illustrious literary, academic and artistic individuals whom Kahan depicted with such perspicacity.

- Meanwhile, the archives of Melbourne architect Arthur Purnell now reveal, through the investigations of Dr Derham Groves, the fluctuating professional and personal fortunes of one of Purnell's most loyal clients, the colourful but ultimately tragic Alec Barlow—car dealer, racehorse owner, property developer, entrepreneur and speculator.
- The substantial gift of Chinese children's books and educational texts recently received by the East Asian Collection in the Baillieu Library reflects more than the professional achievements and personal interests of its generous donor, Dr R.F. Price. Many of these titles were published by the tens or even hundreds of thousands and were compulsory reading for young people in China during the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution. As these children grew into adults, their political and ideological leanings and social

mores must surely have been affected in various ways by this type of literature.

- The Grainger Museum is perhaps the most literal representation of a person in a collection. This autobiographical museum is unique in Australia and, in many aspects, internationally. Its re-opening in 2010 will include a very engaging computer-based interactive research tool, generously funded by the Hugh Williamson Foundation and discussed here by Ms Monica Syrette.

Just as collections connect us to people from our past and present, they are preserved for the education and enjoyment of other people of the present and future. It is therefore particularly pleasing to see the University's cultural collections being used so actively to these ends.

The Hon. Alex Chernov AO QC is the 20th Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, where he originally graduated in law and commerce. He has had a distinguished career as a barrister and judge, while also playing a significant role in the leadership of the legal profession and legal education. Alex and his wife Elizabeth Chernov—also a law graduate of the University of Melbourne—have three children, all Melbourne alumni.