SWORDS, SANDBALS AND THE SILVER SCREEN

Fimmakers have long been drawn to the ancient world. Professor Maria Wyke, who will present some classics of silent cinema at a talk at the Nicholson Museum on 3 May, discusses the timeless appeal of antiquity.

In recent years, Hollywood has released several big-budget films set in antiquity, such as Gladiator (2000), Clash of the Titans (2010), The Eagle (2011) and, coming in 3D to a cinema near you in 2014, Pompeii.

However, ever since it emerged as a new technology more than a century ago, cinema has been fascinated with the ancient world. Within a few months of the first public showings of moving images in 1896, the Roman Emperor Nero was brought to life on the screen trying out poisons on his slaves. By the time sound was introduced into movies in the late 1920s, more than 800 films had been made that drew inspiration from ancient Greece, Rome, Egypt or the Bible.

A handful of these films that are feature length — such as Quo Vadis (1913, an adaptation of a novel about Nero’s persecution of the Christians), Cabin in 1914, a celebration of Rome’s conquest of north Africa) and Ben-Hur (1925, containing perhaps the most spectacular chariot-race of film history) — have been restored and released on DVD or screened at film festivals. Yet the vast majority of these ancient-inspired films remain largely forgotten.

More than 400 of these films survive in archives across the world, some of them in multiple prints designed for different types of audience. They range from historical, mystical and religious epics, and intriguing adaptations of theatre and novels, to comedies, parodies, animated cartoons, documentaries and travelogues. Their settings are just as diverse, covering everywhere from Spain to the Near East and historical periods from Pharaonic Egypt to Late Antiquity. These fragile...
sometimes damaged, prints, as well as their associated publicity posters, programs, and press reviews, are a treasure trove of material that awaits exploration and understanding. The persistent presence of antiquity in early cinema compels us to ask: Why did so modern a medium have so strong an interest in antiquity right from its start? What did antiquity do for cinema? And what did cinema do for antiquity?

Together with Pantelis Michelakis from the University of Bristol and in collaboration with historians of antiquity and of cinema, film archivists, and festival exhibitors, I have been developing a research project to make this fascinating body of material better known and appreciated.

The project began with screenings in London, Bristol, Los Angeles, Berlin and Bologna of some of the most rarely seen antiquity films (dating as far back as 1903), and it continues with further investigation of surviving prints – including those in the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra. In 2013 we published a collection of essays, The Ancient World in Silent Cinema (Cambridge University Press), and work continues to stimulate the proper preservation and documentation of these films, restoration of the most beautiful and complex, and – the ultimate goal – screening in cinemas along with freshly commissioned musical scores.

Professor Maria Wyke will be speaking as part of the Academy Travel sponsored ‘Italy: travels in art. history and culture’ lecture series in the Nicholson Museum on Saturday 3 May at 2pm. The title of her talk is ‘The irresistible attraction of antiquity in ancient cinema’. This event will present many of these films for the first time in Australia. See what’s on pages 32 and 33 for booking details.

Professor Maria Wyke is a Professor of Latin and co-director of the Centre for Research into the Dynamics of Civilisation at University College, London (email: m.wyke@ucl.ac.uk)
Her famous works include the artist reciting Buddhist texts to corpses in a mortuary (somewhat shockingly as a woman and not a male monk), and the amusing display in Thai public spaces of large reproductions of famous Western artists from Vincent van Gogh to contemporary American artist Jeff Koons. The images are shown in a market or temple, accompanied by recordings of comments from the local audience. In a temple, a local Buddhist monk narrates a sermon over the images. The artist is interested in the way culture positions art and how ordinary Thais might receive it.

The artist’s work demonstrates how a person is constructed by their sometimes false expectations of “the other”. In one performance piece, recorded on video, the artist spent a few weeks pretending to be pregnant, a display so convincing that female colleagues congratulated her for her courage in becoming pregnant rather later in life and her willingness to have a child when unmarried. Her more recent work reflects on the artist’s life in relation to the natural environment and ordinary Thais might receive it.

An extract from her prose for a 2003 exhibition at Sculpture Square in Singapore is called ‘One night I went there again‘, and is read to dead bodies:

The soundless listening of the bodies emanated a perfume named Knowing, which – oh, emotional fluctuations, disappointment of knaves. Even though they do not know the nature of art, the bodies were ready to join the game to celebrate the emptiness of the Art narrated by death and defeat. The bodies allow themselves to be covered by brightly colored drapes knowing perfectly well that it is unbecoming.

Rasdjarmrearnsook writes about art in newspapers, and in an emerging genre of literary and intellectual magazines in Thai. An insightful and wide-ranging 2007 interview from Freeman magazine will be translated for the catalogue. The University Art Gallery’s exhibition (opening 17 March) coincides with the 19th Biennale of Sydney and with the 12th International Conference of Thai Studies at the University of Sydney (22 to 24 April).

The exhibition will be curated by Emeritus Professor John Clark and Clare Veal, who is completing a PhD in the Department of Art History and Film on contemporary photographic expressions of Thai identity. It will be presented in association with 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art which will hold an exhibition of the artist’s more recent video work as well as a major installation reconstruction, Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook: Storytellers of the Town (14 March to 10 May). The artist will give several public talks and seminars for art students.

An illustrated catalogue, to be published in May, will include essays by Clark, Veal, and Thai scholars, analysing the artist’s role in the Thai avant garde, her particular position as a woman artist, and the interaction of her visual oeuvre with her extensive literary work.

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook: The Village and Elsewhere opens on Monday 17 March in the University Art Gallery.
DRAWN FROM EXPERIENCE

There is no medium more central to artistic practice in the early modern period than drawing. It is at once a tool of instruction, a form of visual communication, and an expressive medium for personal ideas and images.

As drawing is a technology that almost all of us are taught to use, looking at historical drawings gives a unique sense of our proximity to and distance from artists of the past. In seeing the pressure of chalk, pen or pencil applied to paper we may gain some insight into the artist’s process – the speed or development of the drawing and the kinds of strokes used – and yet the purpose or meaning of the image often remains tantalisingly obscure. Unlike paintings, which are often finished images for public or private display, drawings often form part of a larger artistic process of depiction, discovery and experimentation. They tell us much about the nature of artistic practice, the development of themes and ideas, and the private world of the artist’s imagination.

Fugitive forms and grand designs: 16-19th century drawings from the Roddy Meagher Collection captures some of the diversity and richness of the forms and functions of drawing from the 16th century to the early 19th century. It displays works by artists such as Stefano Della Bella (1610–64), Elisabetta Sirani (1638–65), Jean-Baptiste Pillement (1728-1808), George Romney (1769-1802), Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), Théodore Géricault (1791-1824), and Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863).

The drawings range from carefully finished designs, such as an extraordinary Rococo landscape by Pillement and a loving Madonna and Child by Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-79); to spare, linear sketches such as Gericault’s powerful drawing of Hercules wrestling Antaeus, a page of heavily robed women from Delacroix’s North African sketchbook, and Romney’s melancholic, distorted images of prison inmates. Sitting somewhere between these extremes are the delicate pen drawings of figures observed from life by Della Bella, Sirani’s expressive figure study, and Lawrence’s delicate portrait of the beautiful Lucy Anne Bloxam.

To take in the diversity of these images, the exhibition is structured around four broad themes: people, which comprises portraits, figure studies and character sketches; place, which includes drawings of real and imagined landscapes and settings; spirit, which encompasses drawings of holy figures and heavenly beings; and idea, which groups the numerous sketches made by Romney, Gericault and others for ambitious artistic schemes. By turns bold, sensuous, delicate and playful, the drawings reveal the variety and complexity of artistic practice in the early modern era and its public and private dimensions.

The works shown in this exhibition are a small part of the remarkable gift made to the University Art Gallery by the late Justice Roddy Meagher. While the best known works in Meagher’s collection may be modern paintings or Asian art and artefacts, his collecting also extended to historical drawings, and this exhibition contextualises many works that have never been displayed publicly.

‘Fugitive forms and grand designs’, to be held at the University Art Gallery from 12 May to 31 August, is the first in a series of exhibitions and publications that will highlight the riches of Meagher’s collection and make them available to the public for study and enjoyment, as well as honour Meagher’s cosmopolitan legacy in Australian culture.

Dr Georgina Cole graduated from the University of Sydney in 2010 with a PhD in the area of Art History. She is a Lecturer in Art History and Theory at the National Art School.
Loud, large and lovable, the sulphur-crested cockatoo (Cacatua galerita) is a well-known inhabitant of Sydney. It has always been present around the fringes of Sydney and west of the Great Dividing Range but, over the past few decades, the sulphur-crested cockatoo has expanded its range, and numbers have increased dramatically throughout suburban Sydney and into the city centre. Yet despite its almost iconic status, surprisingly little is known about the ecology of this charismatic bird.

As part of my PhD studies, and in collaboration with the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney, I have been researching the movements, population size and site loyalty of the cockatoos within the gardens. The relative accessibility of the gardens’ cockatoo population gives us an opportunity to trial a new marking technique that allows us to track individual birds. The cocky’s ability to grab our attention makes it a great subject for an interactive community-monitored project in an urban environment.

Previous studies from the 1980s successfully monitored populations of galahs and corellas using crude metal wing tags. In the United States, vultures have also been tracked with large plastic wing tags. A recent study used plastic cattle ear tags to monitor the Australian white ibis, with members of the public identifying individual birds and reporting their location. However, this technique has never been applied to sulphur-crested cockatoos – until now.

Within several weeks of tagging our first cockatoos, various government and wildlife agencies within Sydney were forwarding reports of tagged cockatoos they had received from the public. When we began receiving several reports of cockatoo sightings a week, we decided to try out social media in an effort to extend the project’s reach, so we created a Facebook site.

SIMPLIFYING SIGHTING REPORTS
Facebook has made it easier for people to report cockatoo sightings. We created the page to engage people in the project and to get the message out to a potentially very different audience. We posted regular status updates of recent sightings of a bird in a new location, often with photos people had sent in. People quickly began following “Cockatoo Wingtag” on Facebook, where they could see their photos and provide comment on the posts.

When the cockatoos are tagged they are also assigned nicknames, and these are far more personable than simple identification numbers (such as 022). Once we publicised the names – such as “Watermelon” or “Shakespeare” – on Facebook, people began to report the cockatoos by name rather than ID number, particularly those people who were visited regularly by the same birds.

“Friends” of the Facebook page can follow an individual bird’s sightings, as well as comment and interact with others who have seen it. If a previously unseen tagged bird is sighted, people check Facebook for the bird’s name and where it was reported. Creating a sense of ownership of the birds, as well as the chance to interact with both the project findings and the researchers, leads to a strong sense of involvement and satisfaction among members of the community. Social media is a powerful tool for involving people and sharing knowledge about the state of the natural world.

You can follow the project at www.facebook.com/cockatowwingtags and by downloading our iPhone app Wingtags.

Adrian Davis is Collections Management Officer and is responsible for cataloguing and maintaining the natural history collections in the Macleay Collection.
A GENTLEMAN AND A SCHOLAR

Emeritus Professor John Hennessy has left an incomparable legacy – not just to the field of Near-Eastern Archaeology, but also to the Nicholson Museum, reflects Dr Craig Barker.

Hennessy travelled to the Middle East, where he worked on several archaeological projects, visiting Israel, Jordan, Syria and Turkey, even hiring a taxi in Jerusalem for three weeks for £21. In Turkey, he served as the first student scholar at the newly established British School of Archaeology at Ankara where he met many of the great Near Eastern archaeologists of the era.

In 1951 Hennessy worked on various excavations in Cyprus, and through his connection with Professor James Stewart he was involved in the excavations at Myrtou-Pigadas, the first excavation directly sponsored by the University of Sydney. From this project Hennessy directed the excavation of a series of Bronze Age tombs at an ancient cemetery site called Stephania – many of the finds from these excavations are displayed in the Nicholson Museum exhibition Aphrodite’s Island. Hennessy reminisced much later that the team “bicycled to and from the site, lovely and cool in the morning but hellish hot in the afternoons”. Although he was never to excavate in Cyprus again, his subsequent courses in Cypriot Archaeology at the University of Sydney inspired many students and future Cypriot scholars.

In 1952 Hennessy worked at the famous site of Jericho under renowned English archaeologist Dame Kathleen Kenyon, who would describe him as “one of the most promising” students she had met. She later became his doctoral supervisor at Magdalen College, Oxford. In the early 1960s, and the two became life-long friends – their friendship was a contributing factor in Kenyon sending a range of Jericho artefacts to Professor Stewart for exhibition in the Nicholson Museum. Hennessy’s thesis, The Foreign Relations of Palestine during the Early Bronze Age (1967), remains a highly regarded work, it was the first of many important published works.

Hennessy returned to Australia and rejoined the Department of Archaeology at the University of Sydney, lecturing from 1965 to 1981, having married Ruth Shannon in 1954. After his doctoral studies at Oxford, Hennessy began a long association with the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, serving as assistant director and then director from 1965 to 1970. During this period, he conducted excavations at the Damascus Gate of the Old City, then at the temple at Amman Airport. He returned to Australia in 1970 and was appointed permanently to the Edwin Cuthbell Hall Chair of Near Eastern Archaeology in 1973.

Hennessy oversaw several important excavations from Sydney. The University excavated the Chalcolithic site of Tell el-Far’ah (South) in 1981, and in 1984, Hennessy inaugurated excavations of the multi-period site of Strategic Area 24, continuing until 1994.

In 1967 while visiting Jordan, Hennessy opened a cache of artefacts at the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, which included a bronze metopes of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The cache was dated to the 7th century BC and is now displayed in the Nicholson collection as part of the exhibition, “As Time Flies: Temples and Tombs of the Ancient World”.

Anyone who heard Hennessy lecture will remember the breadth of his knowledge and his passion for his subject, while his generosity towards students and colleagues was legendary. He would work on unpublished Cypriot material in the lower gallery of the Nicholson Museum, teaching research students archaeological drawing skills – a technique of illustration that became known as the ‘Kenyon-Hennessy school’. Hennessy was a great draftsman and encouraged students to draw using items in the Nicholson collection. It is a practice we still use.

As well as distributing material from his excavations to the Nicholson Museum, the University of New England’s Museum of Antiquities and the University of Queensland’s RD Milnes Antiquities Museum and other Australian collections, Hennessy oversaw parts of the publication and acquisition of Bronze Age and other Cypriot pottery and finds from the excavations and collections of his late teacher Professor Stewart to the Nicholson and other museums. He was a great believer in the role of museums in conveying the wonder and beauty of the ancient cultures he was so passionate about.

Hennessy founded the Near Eastern Archaeology Foundation (NEAF) in 1986 to enable a broader audience access to research of this area. On his retirement in 1990 he was made an Officer of the Order of Australia, and the University of Sydney awarded him an Honorary Doctor of Letters three years later.

John Basil Hennessy was a great Australian archaeologist and teacher. He is survived by his wife, Ruth, and children David, Sarah and Linda. Vale, Professor.
The Macleay Museum sourced several of its first natural history treasures from a vibrant and thriving menagerie in the United States, writes Chris Jones.

Among the mammal specimens in the Macleay collection are purchases from American merchant-naturalist Henry Augustus Ward in the early 1880s.

Ward set up his business, Ward’s Natural Science Establishment, in 1862 in Rochester, New York. This was the beginning of a period of dramatic growth for natural history museums. Ward was responding to demand from museums, especially those associated with universities, to display the diversity of animal, vegetable and mineral life from around the world. While his influence is strongly felt throughout the United States, Ward’s clients included museums from as far afield as South America, Australia and New Zealand.

Edward Sylvester Morse, co-founder of The American Naturalist, who visited Ward’s business in 1873, described it in the journal as a place busy with zoologists, taxidermists, osteologists (who study bones), moulders and carpenters, and thousands of specimens. “The upper room of this building is a wonder to behold,” he wrote. “Hanging from the ceiling are hundreds of skins, including apes, monkeys, wolves, bears, hyenas, lions, tigers, sloths, ant-eaters, armadillos, buffaloes, deer, elk, moose, grapple, yak, wild boar, peccaries; besides an immense collection of such animals as kangaroos, echidna, wombat, Tasmanian devil, Ornithorynchus (platypus), Thylacinus and other rare skins. Some huge alligators, turtles and other reptiles completed the display.”

Ward’s workshop produced such important taxidermists as William Hornaday and Frederick Lucas (who together would form the Society of American Taxidermists in 1880), and Carl Akeley (who would later create the great hall of African wildlife in New York’s American Museum of Natural History).

The staff at Ward’s Natural Science Establishment were experienced field collectors with a working knowledge of anatomy, osteology, and taxonomy, as well as taxidermy, combining an artistic and scientific approach. They were inspired by ground-breaking taxidermist Martha Maxwell’s unique approach to the field as demonstrated in her display at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. Maxwell moved away from stiff poses, instead presenting specimens as they would appear in their natural environment, complete with landscaping and foliage. This kind of taxidermy served as an early proponent of the conservation movement by raising awareness of endangered species. A local example of Ward’s presentation of
How did artist Jeffrey Smart, whose 2012 travelling retrospective coined the phrase “master of stillness”, create so much conversation at the University Art Gallery?

Fittingly, the exhibition’s special events focused on talks between friends. In December 2013, David Malouf, in conversation with art critic Christopher Allen, spoke of his long friendship with Smart, and his interest in tracking the choices of an artist renowned for self-criticism.

In January 2014, acclaimed film director Bruce Beresford and writer Virginia Duigan discussed their friendship with Smart, which was cemented on a ship bound for Italy in the early 1960s. In Malouf’s words, Smart’s works “are like scenes from a film or stills from a set where characters are about to walk on”.

ALONG CAME A SPIDER

The Macleay Museum is home to a large, rare specimen thought to be from South America – but even more unusual is the technique of its preservation, writes Rob Blackburn.

There is a large spider on display in the Macleay Museum. It is admired by budding entomologists, pointed at by excited children, and reviled by anxious arachnophobes. Recent research reveals it is most likely Theraphosa blondi, the Goliath bird-eating spider. It’s the world’s heaviest species of spider, whose females have been known to live for up to 20 years. This one however, probably crawled its last before 1800.

Held in place by a single pin through a crater in its cephalothorax, this enormous arachnid sits under a very simple caption “Large Spider; South America; Collected late 1700s”.

Yet for those willing to peer closely, there are tiny wire hooks protruding from the ends of each leg, and fragments of wire are visible between leg segments, suggesting a wire framework inside.

On a recent visit to the Macleay Museum, Georgie Brown from the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow, Scotland, chanced upon the display and instantly recognised the spider’s shape and design as very similar to a specimen held in the Hunterian. The Glaswegian specimen is also filled with a wire framework, and is considered unique to collections throughout the United Kingdom. No other spider is known to be mounted in this manner – until now, with this specimen in the Macleay.

To discover the nature of the wiring inside this rare specimen, we took the Macleay spider to the Sydney University Veterinary Teaching Hospital radiography department. The x-ray shows a thin wire running from the tip of each leg to meet in the spider’s cephalothorax. This contrasts with the spider in the Hunterian, which has a single run of wire controlling each pair of legs, with the feet connected by an extra strand of wire.

These two rare spiders probably came from traders in the northern region of South America. They were most likely transported to Britain alive, then mounted for display by an artist in Scotland and sold to private collectors such as museum founders Alexander Macleay or William Hunter.

Unlike butterflies and beetles, most spiders don’t survive drying out for display – the majority of the Macleay’s arachnid collection is held in glass jars and preserved with an ethanol solution. To the right of the giant spider in the Macleay gallery is a jumbled drawer of dry arachnids, a reminder that specimens aren’t always ideally preserved, and that not every specimen gets the kind of specialised attention reserved for the most precious, such as Theraphosa blondi.

Rob Blackburn is a Curatorial Assistant at the Macleay Museum.
GAME OF THE NAME

When taxonomist Tony Gill was faced with naming a new species of fish, he enlisted the help of some eager primary school students.

Taxonomy is the science of describing and classifying species. The work of a taxonomist covers a wide range of tasks – from collecting specimens in the field (which in my case often involves scuba diving on coral reefs) to looking down a microscope, and counting and measuring features (in my case, often more of the latter). Some of this work is assisted in the discovery of the new species, particularly when they have friends, particularly when they have some eager primary school students.

The specimen, which Dr Bogorodsky collected in the Farasan Islands in the southern Red Sea, represented a new genus. Although it resembles species of the genus Xenisthmus, it differs most notably in that it lacks scales on the body. We quickly agreed on a new genus name that reflected this: Gymnoxenisthmus (from the Greek gymnos, meaning naked). However, we couldn’t agree on the specific epithet (the second part of a species name).

An opportunity to enlist a little help from an unbiased audience came when the Macleay Museum provided an activities booth at the Australian Museum’s Science Festival Expo in August 2013. Several thousand primary-school age students attended this event. My activity looked at how new species are named, and I invited students to help me select a name for the new xenisthmid. I asked the students to suggest possible names based on the appearance of the new species, as well as to vote on suggested names.

The response exceeded my expectations: the students suggested numerous names, and I received 847 votes. The specimen’s distinctive striped coloration was the impetus for most of the names; suggestions included bongo (a type of striped antelope), candy cane, ruler, zebra, milk, carrots, and even Poppy Longstockings. For some, the stripes were reminiscent of the grill marks on barbecued meat, so an array of names involving grilled fish, sausages, kebabs and hotdogs was suggested. The winning name, with 190 votes, was “tiger” (well clear of its closest rival, “ruler”, with 148 votes).

To me, tiger seems a bit of a stretch, as the specimen is less than 2 cm long. Among the votes and suggestions, however, I noticed that several students had offered a slight modification on the name: “little tiger”. Not much is known about xenisthmid biology, but most appear to be ambush predators, feeding on smaller fishes and crustaceans – “little tiger” seemed a perfectly appropriate description. So, I finally had my name: Gymnoxenisthmus tigrinus.

The new species has now been published in the scientific journal Zootaxa. While I frequently receive other new species to describe, and intend to offer species naming as a regular event for school children at the Macleay Museum during school holidays. This is an opportunity for children to be involved in the work of a museum scientist. Who knows, perhaps it will inspire one or more of them to pursue a career in taxonomy.

Dr Tony Gill is an expert in the identification and classification of fishes and is Curator of Natural History at the Macleay Museum.

The Nicholson Museum is the reason I am studying at the University of Sydney. I came down from Bathurst to do my Year 10 work experience at the museum in 2010, and fell under the spell of its fascinating collection. I was determined to come back – a decision I doubt I will ever regret.

I signed up to volunteer at the Nicholson Museum’s front desk on the first day of O-Week, determined to keep the promise I made to my ’16 year-old self that I would be back. What a difference this has already made to my university experience.

Now, with first year done and dusted, it’s safe to say that the past nine months have been more than 5000 words due in a week; and one of the nicest atmospheres on campus in which to nurse a hangover!

There is no denying that the experience of tertiary study has been daunting, especially since it’s not just uni life I’m adjusting to, but also life in the big city. Throughout this hectic year, the Nicholson has provided me with a sense of stability: a welcome respite from the information overload that I willingly absorbed (or tried to); an escape from the stress of having 5000 words due in a week; and one of the nicest atmospheres on campus in which to nurse a hangover.

The Nicholson is a haven for lovers of museums and all things antiquity. The Nicholson Museum is long and fruitful – it is already an integral part of my university life.

Trinity Gurich is a second-year Arts student at the University of Sydney.
University museums are an international phenomenon, but the relationship between operating as a public institution and an academic centre at the same time can be complex. Dr Craig Barker, who represented Sydney University Museums at a recent international conference, reports on current discussions.

INTO THE FUTURE

The question of how university museums engage with both the public and the academic community in the 21st century was the subject of an international colloquium held in Ghent, Belgium. Organised by the University of Ghent, Positioning Academic Heritage: challenges for universities, museums and society in the 21st century was held from 17 to 20 November 2013 in the Ghent campus’s historic Het Pand building, constructed in 1201 AD.

Some 45 papers examining the role of university museums were given by museum directors, curators, educators and academics from university collections in Europe, the United States, Japan and Australia. Four main themes were discussed: how to bring diverse museum collections together; the role of university museums in communicating science and history to visitors; the relevance of university museums to society; and museum management in a university environment.

One of the main discussions focused on whether universities with historic museum collections scattered across a campus should unite these collections in a new museum building (a process the University of Ghent is engaged in), or keep the collections separate but unify support networks for museum staff. With the increasing professionalisation of staff in university museums internationally, one of the key discussion points was how to best to work with academics who have traditionally been custodians of collections. Other papers examined the advantageous and unique relationship university museums have with researchers and students, which do not exist in state and private museums.

I presented a paper highlighting the Nicholson and Macleay museums and the University Art Gallery’s engagement with school students, encouraging them to think of their visit to the museum as the first step in a lifelong relationship with tertiary education. This is particularly the case with our work with the University’s Compass Program, developed for students from backgrounds traditionally under-represented in higher education.

Delegates were impressed with how Sydney University Museums have developed MUSE for visitors. The highlight of the meeting was a public lecture given by the director of Oxford University’s Ashmolean Museum, Professor Christopher Brown. He spoke of recent renovations to the Ashmolean’s building and display of collections, noting how the museum has become the centrepiece of cultural activities in Oxford, from blockbuster exhibitions to student-only evenings (as he says, the “best place for students to pick up other students”). The Ashmolean had attracted more than a million visitors within its first year of reopening.

Visits to the rich historic collections of Ghent University were interesting. The university is home to archaeological, medical and ethnographic collections, as well as a zoology museum and herbarium. I also visited Cambridge University Museums in the United Kingdom and met staff involved with education and community outreach programs. Like Sydney University Museums, the eight university museums at Cambridge have recently been brought together, while maintaining their individual locations, staff and identities. They have embarked on an exciting program of events and outreach activities, developing strategies for providing better visitor experiences and increasing visitor numbers. It was incredibly useful to share experiences and knowledge between our two institutions.

Many of the challenges the University of Sydney collections face are similar to those confronting university museums throughout the world. It is important that we engage with our peers in the international community to see how those museums adapt to those challenges. We look forward to making your experience of our collections better each time you visit.

Craig Barker is Manager, Education and Public Programs, at Sydney University Museums.
Florence Watepuru was devoted to preserving the language and culture of her Solomon Islands community — and her work lives on, writes Deborah Hill.

In 1933, University of Sydney anthropologist Ian Hogbin, whose work comprises part of the Solomon Islands collection in the Macleay Museum, photographed a group of Longgu people of the Solomon Islands preparing food for a feast.

The young boy in the photograph, Daniel Besa’a Ogu, carries a kepoli basket on his shoulder as he watches the men make arrangements for the feast. In February 2012, Besa’a Ogu’s granddaughter, Florence Rachel Besa’a Watepuru, came to Sydney along with Chief Steward Bungana of Nangali village, Guadalcanal, to view Hogbin’s photographs of Longgu district. Their visit was the subject of an article in MUSE in July 2012.

Florence Watepuru died in April 2013. Her death is an enormous loss for her family and friends in the Solomon Islands and Australia, and highlights the significance of her contribution to her community.

One of the projects that links Hogbin’s photographs to the current generation is a dictionary project that focuses on weaving and carving. Definitions in Longgu and English have been developed collaboratively through workshops in Nangali and Longgu villages and discussions with elders in Babasu, Longgu and Nangali.

Some of Hogbin’s photographs, along with photographs taken in 2013, will be used to illustrate many of the dictionary entries. Florence Watepuru was instrumental at every step of this project, from organising the people who came to the workshops (weavers, carvers, teachers, elders and village leaders) to articulating to the community the importance of maintaining their culture. Her understanding of the community has been essential to this project.

Florence Watepuru’s conviction that maintaining language and culture is beneficial to the community has convinced others to continue her work. In January 2013, a project focusing on carving, funded by the Australia Museum and led by University of Canberra researcher Dr Elizabeth Bonshek, provided the impetus for community members to commission bowls from carvers in the village. The Paramount Chief of the area, Ben Livu, commissioned a large lali feasting bowl from the Nangali carvers.

Hogbin’s photographs include a men’s dance, the siokole, which requires dancing with shields. At the time Florence Watepuru and Chief Bungana visited Sydney, men had stopped performing this dance, in part because the woven shields had almost disappeared. In June 2013, the men performed the siokole at the inauguration of the new Anglican Bishop of the diocese with makeshift shields. It was the first time it had been publicly performed in more than a decade. In addition, provision of a video recorder through one of the projects means this dance has been recorded.

On a recent trip to continue the dictionary work and to visit Florence Watepuru’s grave in Longgu village, I stayed with her uncle, Father John Besa’a. He spoke warmly of how much the everyday things Florence did and said had enriched his life. She enriched us all.

Associate Professor Debora Hill was funded by the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Program. She is Associate Dean (Innovation), Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra.
It may seem odd to travel so far north to research images from the South Pacific and its communities. However, from the mid-19th century, based on curiosity and a desire to view the “exotic”, Europeans developed a keen appetite for photographs of Pacific Islanders. The photographers were early colonists, missionaries, researchers in anthropology and the ever-expanding sciences, along with traders and tourists. Photographs of Indigenous peoples featured in international exhibitions and were circulated widely among private individuals and within museums and universities. Tens of thousands of photographs crossed oceans, finding their way to institutions in the northern hemisphere.

During a six-week period from September to October in 2013, I visited the British Museum and the Royal Anthropological Institute in London, the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. I also visited the Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde (National Museum of Ethnology) in Leiden, the Netherlands, and the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, France. I talked with key curatorial and collection management staff, viewed exhibitions and researched photographs relevant to the Macleay holding. I discovered the names of three proud Solomon Islander men as well as those of other previously unidentified individuals, places and photographers in our collections. Perhaps part of my own colonial baggage, I thought the grass might be greener in European institutions; however, I found that Sydney University Museums compare well in terms of the quality, care, management and presentation of collections.

When I left Sydney in early September we were in the middle of moving the ethnographic collections as part of the Fisher Library renovation and a broader program of University-wide space management. I returned as the historic photograph collections were being crated for their move to a new storeroom in the RD Watt building on Science Road. Everywhere I went, collections were in a similar state of flux. This was a revelation – I thought it was just us! People often think collections sit behind closed doors and gather dust, but in fact they are almost constantly on the move. They may have travelled around the world or moved thousands of kilometres to arrive at a museum in the first place, and are often destined to move several more times. We improve on their storage and documentation with each move, and learn a little more about them as we go.

Rebecca Conway is Curator, Ethnography at Sydney University Museums. Research conducted during her travelling scholarship informed development of the exhibition Points of Focus: historic photographs from the Pacific, Macleay Museum, 1 March to 1 November 2014.

AROUND THE WORLD

As a recipient of a University of Sydney General Staff Travelling Scholarship, Rebecca Conway visited European museums for research and to explore the Macleay Museum’s collections in an international context.
Michael Turner describes an unusual pot with a fascinating story. It is currently on display in the Nicholson Museum’s exhibition, 50 Objects 50 Stories.

In 1961, archaeologist James Stewart (1913–62) returned to Cyprus for the final time. He was to die, tragically young, the following year. Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology at the University of Sydney, curator of the Nicholson Museum, and one of the great figures of Cypriot archaeology, Stewart was returning to a site, Lapatsa, that he had excavated before the war.

Lapatsa was situated on a hillside above Karmi, the latter “a delightful village”, said Stewart, “miserably poor but extremely picturesque and full of cats”. Cats had a special significance for Stewart – he claimed they were the only thing that kept him warm during the winters of his years as a prisoner of war in Germany. There were often as many as 20 at his ancestral home, ‘Mount Pleasant’, near Bathurst, in rural NSW. Lapatsa itself was also beautiful. “Up in the mountains with a magnificent view over the sea … We have a little church dedicated to Ayia Marina just below us and an excellent spring of water where there is a buried dragon … On quiet days there is nothing except the braying of donkeys and the sound of the woodman’s axe … At the moment the almond blossom is out and all the wild flowers.”

This askos, an oil vessel, was found intact less than 30 cm below the surface, some distance from the main group of tombs, together with other pottery, which was “mostly very badly broken”. Stewart suggested it had been thrown out from one of the tombs that was being cleared for re-use.

He described it as “one of the most beautiful Red Polished Ware askoi which I have ever seen”. The shape of the askos is intriguing. It has the form of a quadruped, but which one? Is it imitating, perhaps, the rare, wild mountain sheep of Cyprus, the moufflon? Does the handle copy the large, swept-back horns of the animal?

By arrangement with the Cypriot authorities, many of the finds from the excavation at Lapatsa came back to Australia with Stewart for research and publication. Most of these are now in the Nicholson Museum, as well as in museums around Australia and in New Zealand. Robert Merrillees, a student of Stewart’s and one of the team at Lapatsa, describes Stewart’s attitude to teaching and the use he made of the Nicholson Museum: “None of his students will ever forget the practical lessons held in the Museum, when cases were opened and students allowed to handle the objects for themselves.”
Bill Blake, who is nine years old and his brother, Thom, who is six, love visiting museums of all kinds. Here they tell us what they like most—and why.

Museums are awesome because you get to see what older civilisations were like. You get to see things that are really old, like swords, spears and mummies. We both like looking at things that are really precious and made out of gold, or old, like swords, spears and mummies.

You also get to see models of what older civilisations were like. I like to play with Lego or make a shield and swords and play fighting games. It was fun to dress up like Romans or be wrapped up like an Egyptian mummy.

A GOOD GIFT SHOP

I like souvenirs like a little metal catapult or a scabara. It’s something you can take home and use as a toy to act out historical stories. I really like a shop with good books, and got a great book from the Nicholson Museum about Greek mythology. I also like the paper 3D gods and heroes.
OUT AND ABOUT


2. David Ellis, Director, Sydney University Museums, left, with David Malouf and gallerist Philip Bacon at the opening of the exhibition Jeffrey Smart 1921-2013: Recondita Armonia – Strange Harmonies of Contrast.

3. Macleay Museum curatorial and audit staff on Adrian Davis’s (seated, centre) last day at the museum. A fond farewell from all and thanks to Adrian for his cockatoo story on pages 8-9.


5. A crowded Philosophy Room on a hot summer’s afternoon. The audience is listening to Derek Parker’s Nicholson Museum Champagne Cream Tea lecture on Lord Byron in Greece.

6. Nicholson Museum curatorial assistant Candace Richards has fun for #museumselfie day — a Twitter event on 22 January when people around the world photographed themselves in museums and posted the results on social media.

7. Michael Turner about to give the first of the 2014 Academy Travel-sponsored free Saturday afternoon talks in the series Italy: Travels in art, history and culture.

8. Museums Education and Public Programs team, Suzanne Kortlucke and Craig Barker, in the Quadrangle.

9. Sydney University Museums Collections Officer Rachel Lawrence and Conservator Ana Barros Soares at the Sydney University Museums’ Christmas Party.


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WHAT’S ON AT SYDNEY UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS

Public events are subject to change. For further information and to view the latest timetable, visit sydney.edu.au/museums and click on ‘What’s on’.

MARCH 2014

Saturday 1 March, 2pm
Academy Travel’s Italy: travel through art, history and culture lecture series
The Timeless Legacy of Castellani: Classical Inspirations: The Archaeological Jewellery
Dr Monica Jackson FSA
Venue: Nicholson Museum
Cost: free
Venice: Macleay Museum

Friday 7 March, 5pm
Public lecture
From Makers to Museums: PNG History through Skirts and Photographs
Dr Ema Lié (University of Sydney)
Venue: Nicholson Museum
Cost: free
Venice: Macleay Museum

Tuesday 11 March, 6.30pm
Public lecture
The Demise of Angkor: Remains Of An Empire
Professor Dietmar Müller (Australian National University)
Venue: Macleay Museum
Cost: free
Venice: Macleay Museum

APRIL 2014

Saturday 5 April, 12.30pm
Curator’s floor talk
POINTS OF FOCUS: HISTORIC PHOTOS FROM THE PACIFIC
Rebecca Conway (Macleay Museum)
Cost: free
Venue: Macleay Museum

Saturday 5 April, 2pm
Academy Travel’s Italy: travel through art, history and culture lecture series
The Sack of Rome 408 AD
Dr Peter Brannan
(University of Sydney)
Cost: free
Venue: Nicholson Museum

Wednesday 9 April, 6.30pm
Public lecture
GALLIPOLI: THE BATTLEFIELD
Professor Tony Sagona FSA
(University of Sydney)
Cost: $32 ($25 for Friends of the Nicholson Museum)
Venue: Nicholson Museum

Tuesday 15 April, 6–7pm
Sydney Ideas and Australian Association for Pacific Studies
Public lecture
Opening Up to our Pacific Neighbours
Stewart Firth
(Australian National University)
Cost: free
Venue: Sydney Law School Foyer

Wednesday 15 April, 10am–4pm
Free University Heritage Tour
Thursday 17 April, 10am–4pm
Children’s Day

MAY 2014

Saturday 3 May, 2pm
Academy Travel’s Italy: travel through art, history and culture lecture series
The Irresistible Attraction of Antiquity in Early Cinema
Professor Maria Wyke
(University College London)
Cost: free
Venue: Nicholson Museum

Wednesday 7 May, 6.30pm
Public lecture
The Right to World Heritage
Professor Lynn Maskell
(Stanford University)
Cost: free
Venue: Macleay Museum

Wednesday 14 May, 6.30pm
Public Lecture
Writing a Life: Travels with Jim and Eve Stewart in Australia and Cyprus
Dr Judy Powell
(University of Queensland)
Cost: $32 ($25 for Friends of the Nicholson Museum)
Venue: Nicholson Museum

Monday 19 May, 5pm
Sydney Writers Festival event
The Reel
Celebrated historian Professor Iain McCallum talks about his book, The Reef (Penguin, 2015), and the strategies he employed to write this human story of the living reef.
Cost: free
Venue: Macleay Museum

JUNE 2014

Saturday 7 June, 2pm
Academy Travel’s Italy: travel through art, history and culture lecture series
Machiavelli’s Prince: Life and Afterlife
Dr Francesco Borghesi
(University of Sydney)
Cost: free
Venue: Nicholson Museum

Wednesday 11 June, 6.30pm
Public lecture
‘The Pump Don’t Work’ Cause the VANDALS TOOK THE HANDLE!: REHABILITATING A FORGOTTEN BARBARIAN GROUP
Dr Andy Merrills
(University of Leicester)
Cost: $32 ($25 for Friends of the Nicholson Museum)
Venue: Nicholson Museum

SCHOOL HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES

Fun activities all day for children aged 5-18 years with art and craft activities running throughout each day. Entry is by gold coin donation.

APRIL SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Tuesday 15 April, 10am–4pm
Ancient Gods, Goddesses, Heroes and Heroines: A Children’s Day
Unleash your inner Olympian and discover the world of ancient Greek mythology.

Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief (rated PG) will be screened in the Nicholson Museum from 4pm.
Venue: Nicholson Museum
(In conjunction with Sydney Greek Festival)

Thursday 17 April, 10am–4pm
The Village and Elsewhere: A Children’s Day
Get creative and inspired and join us for a children’s day to create your own artwork!
Venue: University Art Gallery

ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN

APRIL SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Macleay Museum
Points of Focus: Historic Photographs from the Pacific
Weave Pacific patterns and stories. Make a fish, write postcards from the Pacific and explore the exhibition in the hunt for specific details – can you spot them all?

MAKE A NAME FOR YOURSELF!
Help Macleay Museum’s pathologist Dr Tony Gill to scientifically name a new species of fish in the April school holidays. All children who visit the Macleay Museum get the chance to enter our competition to name a new species!
Venue: Nicholson Museum
Come and see the world’s largest LEGO Athenian Acropolis on display in the Nicholson Museum.
POINTS OF FOCUS: HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE PACIFIC
1 MARCH – 1 NOVEMBER 2014

Historic photographs of the Pacific frame our understanding of the region in the past and today. This exhibition features a rich selection of images taken by a range of individuals including colonists, anthropologists and tourists from the 1860s onwards.

‘China Straits from Samarai Island Papua’, 1929, Photo: WJ Jackson, photographic print (detail), Macleay Museum (HP2013.1.1)