

SESSION 11

Museums and galleries: transforming policy and practice to create a sustainable future

Convener:

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RATIONALE

Since first contact, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultural heritage has been recorded and collected by both Australian and international institutions. Museums and galleries have long recognised the value of these collections, but only recently recognised their responsibilities for ensuring Indigenous heritage is accessible to Indigenous peoples, and managed and interpreted in accordance with cultural protocols and values.

Political action and advocacy in the post-referendum era transformed the policies and practices of Australian museums and galleries. Key events such as the vanguard successes of the repatriation of ancestors and cultural material by the Tasmanian Aboriginal community since the mid 1970s, and the 1978 UNESCO regional seminar "Preserving Indigenous cultures: a new role for museums" heralded a new era in the relationships between museums and Indigenous communities. The growth of cultural centres and keeping places in regional and remote communities during the past few decades has also resulted in a major transformation. It wasn't, however, until the launch of *Previous Possessions New Obligations: policies for museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people* in 1993 by the Council of Australian Museum Associations that we had a national benchmark and industry wide standard. The key principle 'the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination in relation to their cultural heritage', was again reinforced in the 2005 revision *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities*.

And Questions addressed in this session will include: what role are museums and cultural centres playing in the maintenance, transmission and renewal of Indigenous culture? How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing collections to assert, cultivate or reclaim identity? How are museums and cultural centres supporting the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination in relation to their cultural heritage?

Session comprises two parts with total of seven presentations and a panel discussion:

PART 1: Communities and museums: maintaining culture through partnerships

In collaboration: Collecting, interpreting and preserving Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural heritage at the National Museum of Australia

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Julie Gough

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ABSTRACT

In 2003 the National Museum of Australia embarked on an ambitious collecting project. Its aim was to collaborate with the community to develop a new collection of Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural material and a new exhibition *We're Here: Tasmanian Aboriginal communities* (2004). Initial conversations revealed many Tasmanian Aboriginal people held a great deal of mistrust towards museums due to previous negative experiences. One of the major aims of the project thus became, to strengthen the relationship between the community and the museum by fostering an inclusive dialogue where the past could be examined, new ideas explored and respectful practices developed and applied. This paper presents both a museum and a community perspective on adopting a collaborative approach to collecting, interpreting and preserving Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural heritage in an institutional context.

Amanda Reynolds is a curator at the National Museum of Australia. Recent projects include working with Tasmanian and Victorian communities to develop collections, exhibitions, films and books documenting their cultural heritage and fostering the reclamation of cultural traditions. Amanda was one of the curators who developed the First Australians Gallery for the opening of the Museum in 2001 and was the coordinator for *Tracking Kultja: the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Festival*. Julie Gough is a Tasmanian Aboriginal visual artist and writer involved in uncovering and re-presenting historical stories as part of an ongoing project that questions and re-evaluates the impact of the past on our present lives. Her work is concerned with developing a visual language to express and engage with conflicting and subsumed histories. Julie is currently on long-term research leave from her position as Lecture at the School of Creative Arts, James Cook University.

2. Roles of the Kanamkek-Yile Ngala Museum in cultural preservation and transmission

Mark Crocombe and Basil Dodd

Kanamkek-Yile Ngala Museum, Wadeye

Graeme K Ward

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ABSTRACT

Recent years have seen significant changes in role of museums holding Indigenous Australian cultural materials. The Kanamkek-Yile Ngala Museum at Wadeye was initiated as a storage place for cultural materials and documents collected by Mission and teaching staff. With involvement of Traditional Owners in site-recording, language and other research, the Museum has become not only a storage place, but a centre of a range of community cultural activities, a base for visiting researchers and an important archive supporting community activities. We

discuss its beginnings, involvement of TOs and other community members, measures to conserve cultural materials, historical paper, audio-tape and video archives, support of visiting researchers, and more recent development of relationships with the NT-funded Knowledge Centre, and the Thammarrar Rangers. The Museum remains an informal institution dependent upon volunteers, community support and various funding sources for its maintenance and continuation of its various cultural activities. One of its major strengths is the continuing perception of its role as a custodian for the benefit of its primary stake-holders – the TOs of the region and their families – rather than an ‘owner’ of its holdings. Another is its continuing collaboration with, on the one hand, those stakeholders and, on the other, researchers in a variety of disciplines.

3. The Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi Foundation’s cultural centre

Evan Maloney

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Vince Adams

Yindjibarndi Director of the Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi Foundation

Kerry Churnside

Language Specialist and company secretary of the Ngarluma and
Yindjibarndi Foundation

ABSTRACT

The Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi Foundation have recently approved designs for the development a new cultural complex that includes a museum and library, open-air amphitheatre, café and other spaces designed to meet the needs of the community. The new centre will also provide the foundation for a range of other enterprises including cultural tours. We present an overview of the vision and plans and the significance of the project for the local community.

PART 2: Self-determination through participation: issues for Indigenous people in the industry

4. More than a community museum

Jason Eades

CEO Koorie Heritage Trust, Melbourne <ceo@korieheritagetrust.com>

ABSTRACT

The Koorie Heritage Trust was established in 1985 following a series of events that signalled that Koorie people wanted a voice in the management of our cultural heritage. The Trust was formed for the cultural heritage of Koorie people to be owned, controlled and managed by us. Originally housed at the Museum of Victoria, the Trust has grown from a small community

organisation into a cultural icon for both Koorie and non-Koorie communities located in a three-storey permanent Cultural Centre situated in the heart of Melbourne. The Koorie Heritage Trust Inc reflects the ever-changing culture of the Koorie people. It provides a strong message of a culture continuously re-interpreting ancient tradition into a contemporary landscape. The Trust offers positive reinforcement of identity and a powerful insight into Koorie culture. But what is the Koorie Heritage Trust Cultural Centre – a museum, gallery, keeping place, education centre – or a combination of all of these and more! The Trust’s CEO Jason Eades, will present a paper that explores the inner workings of the Koorie Heritage Trust Cultural Centre and explore the uncensored voice that is presented when Aboriginal people have control over their culture and its interpretation.

Jason Eades is a Gunnai man born in 1972 in Orbost, South Eastern Victoria. Jason’s professional career started in a managerial role at his local Aboriginal Cooperative. From this experience he progressed into a number of senior management positions including Executive Manager at Mirimbiak Victoria Aboriginal Native Title Unit, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria to Chief Executive Officer of the Koorie Heritage Trust. Appointed to the position of CEO in 2004, Jason has focused on promoting the diverse and distinctive identity of Victorian Aboriginal culture. Jason is passionate about creating opportunities for Koorie youth to learn more about their culture and identity in order to strive to reach their full potential.

5. The significance of training and development in supporting self-determination

Leilani Bin-Juda

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of cultural centres throughout Indigenous communities has played a critical role in the maintenance, transmission and renewal of Indigenous culture. In addressing the question how museums and cultural centres are supporting the right of Indigenous peoples to self-determination in relation to their cultural heritage, I will specifically focus on the significance of training and development. In particular, I will analyse the Torres Strait as a case study and highlight the important practical measures used to build the foundations towards sustainable employment. Training and skilling local personnel is fundamental in achieving sustainable employment.

Leilani Bin-Juda is a Torres Strait Islander curator and cultural heritage professional currently working as Cultural Diplomacy Specialist, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. She is a Guest Lecturer in Indigenous Arts Management Course, Victorian College of the Arts and the former Manager of Gab Titui Cultural Centre.

5. Aboriginal Australians and museums

Phil Gordon

Australian Museum <philg@austmus.gov.au>

ABSTRACT

I briefly outline the history of the Australian Museum’s relationship with indigenous peoples discussing some of the political, social and intellectual forces that have driven the ‘grand old’ institution called the Australian Museum in the direction it has taken in responding to the changing demands of Indigenous stakeholders. Of course, all these factors have also influenced

the whole of the Australian museums industry. Over the last 30 to 40 years, there have been many changes in relationships between Indigenous Australians and the broader community. Both political and social rights have been won by Indigenous peoples from land rights through to the acknowledgement of original ownership of this land through the Australian High Court's 1992 Mabo judgment.

As museums don't stand alone from these developments in the broader community, they have had to respond to these changes and have had to question deeply their world views as well as the ways they operate. These are positive outcomes that have enabled museums to grow and maintain relevance, not only with Indigenous peoples, but also the broader Australian community. One of the major factors in the development of the relationship between Indigenous Australians and museums has been the acceptance by museums of the legitimate rights of Indigenous peoples to have a voice in the managements of their cultural property and be considered as an equal partner in the ways that indigenous issues are addressed. It has now been over 25 years since the Australian Museum first repatriated Aboriginal skeletal remains, and other objects to various national museums in the Pacific. These events were brought about due to a range of issues that were emerging prior to and during this period including issues such as land rights, the policies of self-determination within the broader Indigenous communities and within museums the need to address the ongoing changes in the relationships between Indigenous peoples and the broader society.

Phil Gordon is the manager of the Australian Museum's Aboriginal Heritage Unit. Phil specialises in Aboriginal liaison and community consultation on issues such as Aboriginal Museum outreach, and repatriation of Aboriginal human remains and significant cultural property. Phil also provides advice for various government agencies on cultural heritage issues and policy.

6. Panel discussion

Museum participants – Looking at future issues and strategies.