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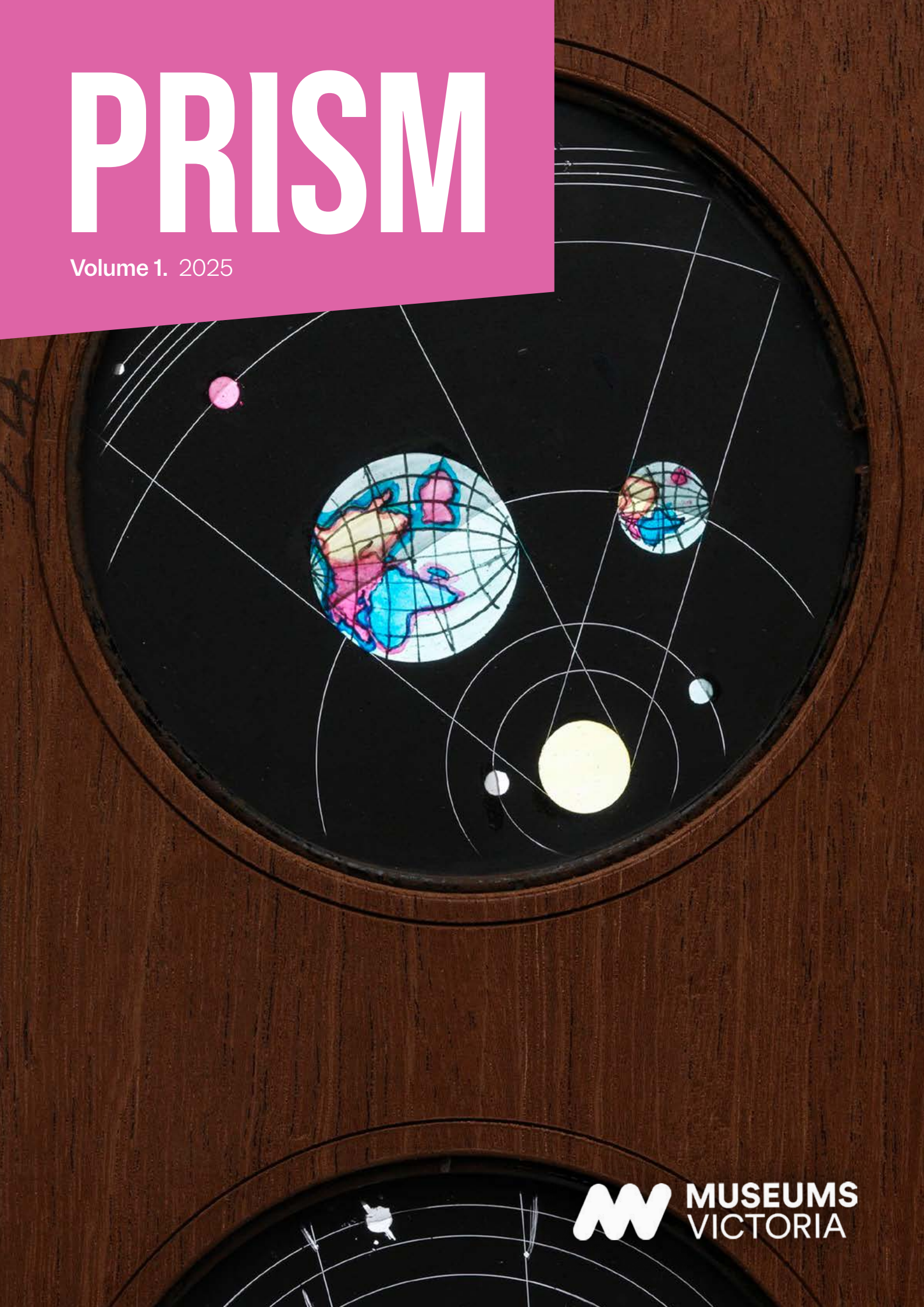

MUSEUMS VICTORIA

MUSEUMS VICTORIA

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PRISM is an annual, online, open access humanities journal. With a particular focus on interdisciplinary research and contemporary perspectives, *PRISM* seeks to engage, explore and challenge the stories, ideas and histories contained within our First Peoples, History & Technology, library and archival collections at Museums Victoria.

PRISM is published by the Museums Victoria Research Institute. As a vital part of Museums Victoria, the Research Institute amplifies our strengths as Australasia's leading museum organisation to address some of the biggest and most complex challenges of our era.

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Cover image: Item MM112613, Lantern slide, 'Newtonian System' and 'Earth's Shadow', circa 1847. Museums Victoria; photographer: Jon Augier; © Museums Victoria.

Image above: Sharing mauri with a nineteenth century kaitaka (a type of highly prized Māori cloak), 2025. Moana Wansolwara Collection, Museums Victoria; photographer: Gregory Doyle.

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PRISM

DR NURIN VEIS

Foreword

Welcome to the first volume of *PRISM*.

Rigid academic disciplines often limit the rich, nuanced ways we experience and make sense of the universe, and these same boundaries can diminish the depth and soul of museum collections.

How might a collection be defined? Who gets to speak about it — and who should? What stories emerge from the objects we hold? Museum collections belong to many: the state, the nation and the diverse communities and individuals that live within their borders.

We live in a world overflowing with things — both physical and digital. At Museums Victoria, we regularly ask ourselves what it is we collect and why. But this question isn't exclusive to institutions. Families, communities and individuals all reflect on what truly matters. These questions and reflections lead to deeper contemplation: what is significant?

Everything in a museum has a form, a story, a presence — a consciousness, if you will. Objects are compact vessels of potent communication. They are valued, treasured and passed on in their very particular physical form. We must honour the way these gifts are carried forward.

Since 1854, Museums Victoria has been building and researching its collections, which chronicle Australia's environmental and cultural history. These are irreplaceable resources for understanding our past, reflecting on our present and guiding us into the future.

Today, Museums Victoria cares for nearly 15 million items. Collection managers, conservators and curators carefully research, document and preserve them for the generations to come.

The richness of these collections is explored through the lenses of science, technology, humanities and First Peoples knowledge. But rigid academic classification is only one approach. At Museums Victoria, we are committed to exploring interdisciplinary perspectives to better understand and share our remarkable collections.

PRISM invites you to both explore the histories contained within our collections and turn an eye to the future. Dr Martin Bush traces the history of popular astronomy across time, and spotlights Museums Victoria's own Melbourne Planetarium, while Dr Laura Jocic's remarkable scholarship identifies the needlework curriculum of a nineteenth century Irish immigrant to Australia.

Jemimah Widdicombe demonstrates that the future of artificial intelligence — and its promise to remake our world — has more in common with the technologies of the past than we might imagine. For Jade Hadfield and Nik McGrath, museum collections and archives are deeply personal; for Jade as a custodian of Pasifika cultural collections, and for Nik due to the relationships she has built while expanding Museums Victoria's museological archives.

Long careers with museum collections offer plenty of time for reflection, and Dr Dzavid Haveric offers insights into his nine-year relationship with Museums Victoria, first as a research associate and then as an honorary associate. And finally, Dr Moya McFadzean considers the successes and failures of exhibitions at the Immigration Museum in a discursive reflection about 'belonging' in museums.

PRISM offers some of what we do every day at Museums Victoria: flexible and creative thinking, passionate care for our collections and diligent research into the histories that shape the world we live in.

Each year across our Melbourne Museum, Scienceworks, Royal Exhibition Building and Immigration Museum campuses, Museums Victoria offers countless exhibitions, tours and public programs. But this journal offers something more: the chance to dig a little deeper, stay a little longer and read a little further.

That's the promise of *PRISM*.

Dr Nurin Veis
Director, Museums Victoria Research Institute

CONTRIBUTORS

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JEMIMAH WIDDICOMBE

Two cable samples, not obvious museum ‘heroes’, brownish

No more, as in the days of yore,
Shall mountains keep apart,
No longer oceans sunder wide
The human heart from heart,
For man hath grasped the thunderbolt,
And made of it a slave
To do its errands o’er the land,
And underneath the wave. [...]
Stretch on, still on, thou wondrous wire!
Defying space and time,
Of all the mighty works of man
Thou art the most sublime.

The British Workman, 1858[1]

Two cable samples, not obvious museum ‘heroes’, brownish

Identified as ST 28747.1 and ST 28747.2, these Museums Victoria objects are two of the countless telegraph cables preserved indefinitely in collection stores around the world. Throughout history, communication networks have evolved, leaving behind the physical remnants of once-cutting-edge infrastructure. The telegraph was no different, and today’s artificial intelligence (AI) systems follow a similar trajectory — built on layers of extraction, labour and mythmaking.

Artefacts or industrial waste? What can these pieces of submarine telegraph tell us about the cycles, materiality and rhetoric of technology today?

1 Bright, C. (1859). Submarine telegraphs: Their history, construction and working. Crosby, Lockwood and Son, p. 23.

Figure 1: Working photograph of ST 28747.1, Cable Sample – Submarine Telegraph, Newfoundland – Nova Scotia, 1856. Photographer: Jemimah Widdicombe.

Soft ooze and false starts

History inclines towards firsts, lasts, famous figures and the human-angle story. These two cables once formed part of Canada's Cabot Strait telegraph. This cable would go on to be the first link in the transatlantic submarine telegraph system that connected Europe and America in the mid-1800s. Eyewitness accounts describe how, on a summer's day in 1856, it took 15 hours[2] to haul this cable coil off a boat.[3] Submerged in a 'soft ooze'[4] for well over a decade, the Cabot Strait cable would go on to be decommissioned and replaced by the next 'latest' in technology.

There were many failed attempts at linking Europe and America.[5] Some may know of the message that the British Queen Victoria sent down the short-lived line in 1858 to US President James Buchanan. But few will have come across the conversations between the British government and their troops stationed in Canada days before the line failed. The following messages are snatches of a longer exchange sent from government officials to the Sixty-second and Thirty-ninth regiments:

[...] Are you ready?
Can't read. Try 'Daniel's'.
I will try. Slow.[6]

2 History of the Atlantic Cable & Undersea Communications. (2011). *1856 Cabot Strait (Cape Breton-Newfoundland) Cable*. https://atlantic-cable.com/Cables/1856CabotStraitCable/index.htm, accessed 2 March 2025.

3 History of the Atlantic Cable & Undersea Communications. (2011). *Cabot Strait Cable and 1857-58 Atlantic Cables*. https://atlantic-cable.com/Cables/1857-58Atlantic/index.htm, accessed 2 March 2025.

4 Bright, C. (1859), p. 29.

5 Bright, C. (1859).

6 Great Britain. Privy Council. Committee for Trade (1861). *Report of the joint committee appointed by the Lords of the committee of Privy Council for Trade and the Atlantic Telegraph Company, to inquire into the construction of submarine telegraph cables: Together with the minutes of evidence and appendix*. George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, pp. 236–237.

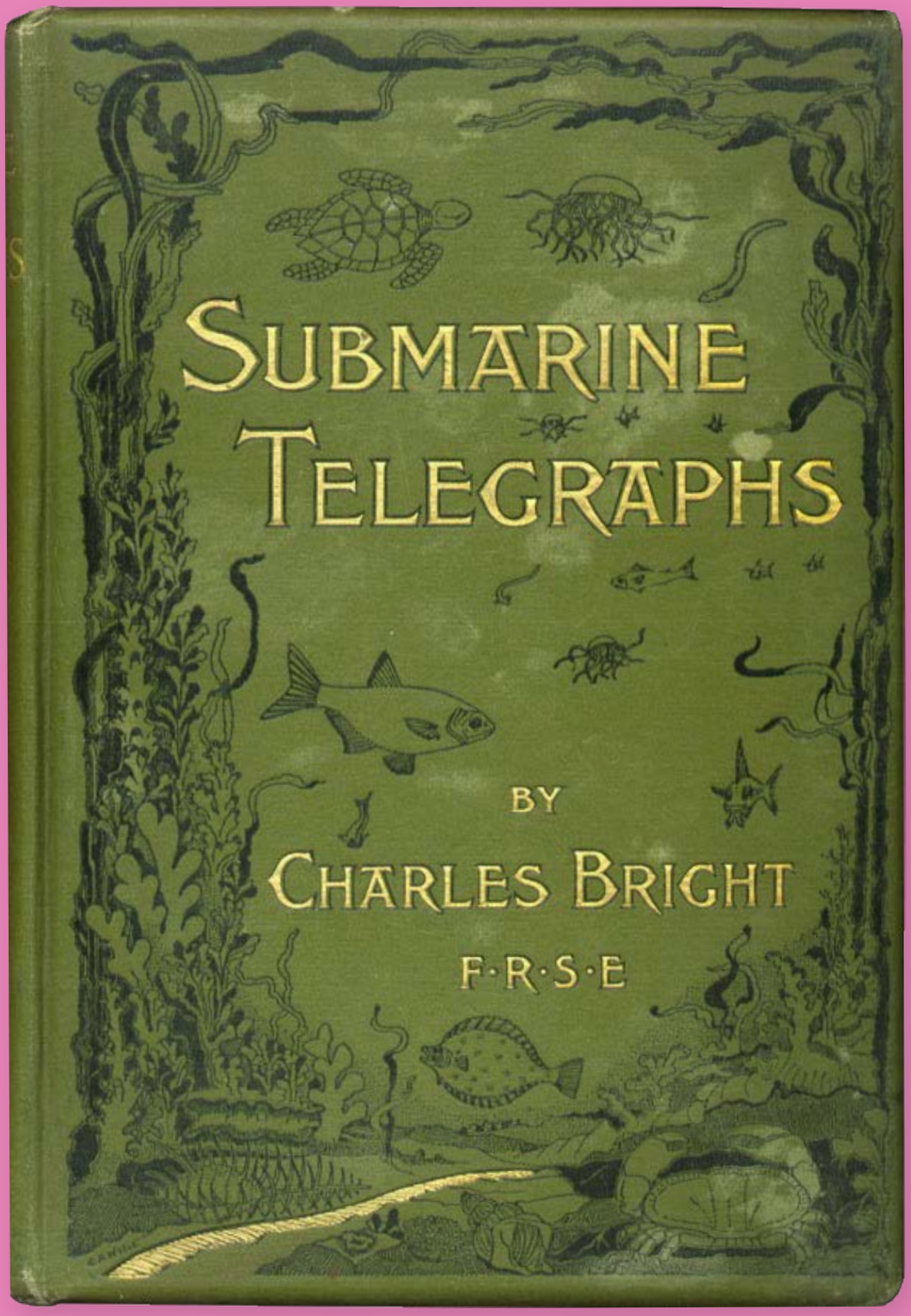

Figure 2: Front cover of Charles Bright's *Submarine Telegraphs*, 1896. Creative Commons.

These messages still resonate today. From dial-up internet to telephony, they recall the challenges of trying to get a message across a slow, faulty connection. In context, they illustrate how the telegraph enabled colonial rule. After the Government of India Act of 1858 transferred control of India from the East India Company to the Crown, the British government no longer required these troops to return to England.[7] Excerpts from Charles Bright's *Submarine Telegraphs* describe the transatlantic cable both as a '*line of love*' and a technical triumph, using data to unite the '*human heart to heart*'.[8] It was also an instrument of power — an expression and tool of exploitative relationships, building empire on the backs of 'others'.

Another cable in a sea of many

ST 28747.1 and ST 28747.2 are not trophy cables. These aren't the kind of immaculate samples people would once mount in velvet boxes and gift to those of importance. Luxury cable boxes, skyscrapers, bridges and space travel testify to the monumental myths of technological progress, but the power of telegraphy and these mundane cables lies in their invisibility. In the 1800s, they formed part of a growing network hidden in the deep ocean. Today, submarine cables span over 1.48 million kilometres and transport over 95% of the world's communications data.[9] Simply put, each Google search or question to an artificially intelligent platform such as ChatGPT pulses through terrestrial and deep-sea networks of fibre-optic cables through to data centres and back again.

Submarine cable researcher and academic Nicole Starosielski aptly points out that while some assume satellites now transmit our everyday data, the ephemeral cloud of contemporary communication is underwater. These modern lines of connection share the seabed with creatures of the deep, retracing paths of now obsolete telegraph lines. Governments and private companies own and control them.[10]

Magic cycles

Early descriptions speak of the telegraph as a form of collective human-made intelligence. The poetry and pictures that punctuate Bright's technical recount of *Submarine Telegraphs* illustrate this. Writing two years after the Cabot Strait cable was installed, The British Workman describes the telegraph as both a triumph of man (not women, who were still of 'nature' at the time) and an act of God.[11]

Unique in its ability to inspire awe and terror, and to transcend time and space, some described the global web of telegraph cables as a central nervous system uniting the world and creating a single kind of intelligence. Samuel Morse, credited as being one of the pioneers of the telegraph, writes in his notes:

7 History of the Atlantic Cable & Undersea Communications. (2011). *Messages carried by the 1858 Atlantic Telegraph Cable.* https://atlantic-cable.com/Article/1858Messages/index.htm, accessed 2 March 2025.

8 Bright, C. (1859), p. 23.

9 TeleGeography. (2025). *Submarine Cable Frequently Asked Questions*. https://www2.telegeography.com/submarine-cable-faqs-frequently-asked-questions#:~:text=As%20of%20early%202025%2C%20we%20believe%20there%20are%20over%201.48,kilometer%20Asia%20America%20Gateway%20cable, accessed 20 February 2025.

10 Starosielski, N. (2015). *The Undersea Network*. Duke University Press.

11 Bright, C. (1859), pp. 22–23.

> *[It would not be long] ere the whole surface of this country would be channelled for those nerves which are to diffuse, with the speed of thought, a knowledge of all that is occurring throughout the land, making, in fact, one neighbourhood of the whole country.*[12]

Metaphors for technology's mysticism and ability to inspire awe constantly morph, adapting to each new wave of innovation and hype. The telegraph became obsolete, but its spiritual and mystical metaphors — connecting continents like thought, defying physical limits — were soon repurposed.[13] This cyclic mysticism is particularly pronounced in popular discourse about artificial intelligence. Just as the telegraph was once seen as a divine force linking minds undersea and overland, AI today is often framed as an almost supernatural intelligence — one that poses as both a threat and saviour to humankind. One of the leading figures in the race to create an artificial general intelligence, Open AI CEO Sam Altman says that his company's products serve one specific goal:

> *Which is intelligence, magic intelligence in the sky.*[14]

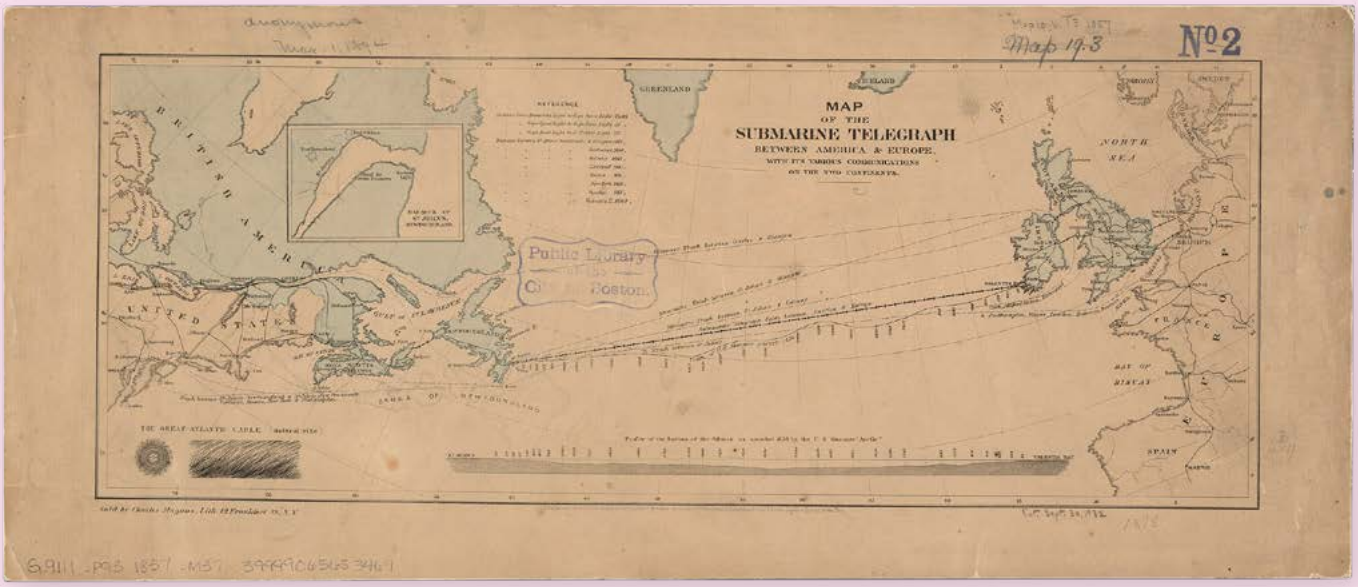

Figure 3: Map of the submarine telegraph between America and Europe, with its various communications on the two continents, Korff Brothers, 1857. Creative Commons.

12 Morse, S. (2014). *Samuel F. B. Morse: His letters and journals.* Cambridge University Press.

13 Telecommunications and the occult. (2022). https://www.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/telecommunications-and-occult, accessed 20 February 2022.

14 Murgia, M. (2023). Financial Times. https://www.ft.com/content/dd9ba2f6-f509-42f0-8e97-4271c7b84ded, accessed 10 February 2025.

Material realities

Mysticism, magic and slick consumer-facing gadgets deflect from the material realities that underpin telegraph and artificial intelligence systems. ST 28747.1 and ST 28747.2 both feature a central wire conductor, insulated by layers of gutta-percha, encased in galvanised iron wires and bound with tarred yarn. Beyond the technical detail, examining each layer of its form exposes deeper complex realities.

Gutta-percha, for example, was a vital insulating material that ensured the functionality of submarine cables, but its popularity wreaked havoc on both the environment and the lives of those forced to harvest it. As Western nations rushed to expand their telegraph networks, they accelerated the extraction of this naturally occurring latex across South-East Asia. This practice relied on exploitative and often brutal human labour practices. The sap from gutta-percha trees flowed slowly and coagulated upon exposure to air. So, to meet demand, entire trees were felled rather than tapped, devastating forests and ecosystems. Once extracted, the raw material was shipped to Western countries for processing and integration into telegraph cables.

Just as the demand for telegraph cables drove destructive practices, the race to develop AI depends on vast environmental and human resources — often hidden from view. As Kate Crawford maps out in *Anatomy of an AI System*, today's race to develop artificial intelligence relies on a similarly extractive logic, depending on fraught supply chains to mine, transport and transform materials like silicon, copper and aluminium into hardware:

> *AI is neither artificial nor intelligent. Rather, artificial intelligence is both embodied and material, made from natural resources, fuel, human labour, infrastructures, logistics, histories, and classifications.*[15]

New cycles?

The rhetoric surrounding telegraph and AI systems reminds us that a cable is never just a cable. ST 28747.1 and ST 28747.2 are significant antiheroes. Unremarkable artefacts of industrial waste, they speak to the complex, challenging cycles of human-made technology as the sum of the conversations and the cultural imaginations that frame them.

Many promised that the telegraph would rewire diplomacy, rewrite how wars were fought and bring peace. And it did — but over a century since the transatlantic cable first connected Europe and America, we also have the gift of hindsight. Facing the fraught, intertwined sociopolitical and technological realities of today, how can looking back prompt us to reimagine the cycles of the future?

15 Crawford, K. (2021). *Atlas of AI: Power, politics, and the planetary costs of artificial intelligence.* Yale University Press, p. 8.

NIK MCGRATH

Within living memory: The transfer of Mary Featherston's Children's Museum archive

The Mary Featherston's Children's Museum archive (1982–97) provides a broad picture of Melbourne's first Children's Museum: a groundbreaking space dedicated to interactive information-based exhibitions that was located within the Museum of Victoria, then in Swanston Street, from 1985 to 1997. Designed by Mary and Grant Featherston, the archive includes their early concept reports, as well as meeting notes, correspondence, design briefs, research notes, production drawings, audiovisual material, publications, layouts, plans and media coverage. As an archivist at Museums Victoria, I worked closely with Mary Featherston and honorary associate Judy McKinty from 2018 to 2023 as they explored and digitised Children's Museum records held in the Museums Victoria archives. These records formed the basis of an illustrated history they co-authored and self-published in 2020, available to read via Museums Victoria's Collections Online website.[1] This laid the groundwork for the eventual transfer of Mary's personal Children's Museum archive to the Museums Victoria archives in 2023.

Transfer of an archive

The transfer of an archive held within personal records to a museum archive requires years of collaboration and trust-building. In 2018, Judy McKinty, a children's play researcher and cultural heritage interpreter long associated with the Children's Museum, contacted Museums Victoria archives regarding research, access and digitisation of Children's Museum records. At this early stage, Judy was endeavouring to appraise the archives held about the Children's Museum, with a view to securing the future of Mary Featherston's personal archive documenting the Children's Museum's history. The first aim was to produce a comprehensive digital record of the Children's Museum photos held in both the Museums Victoria archives and Mary's personal collection.

1 Featherston, M., & McKinty, J. (2020). *Children's Museum, Museum of Victoria 1985–1997: Illustrated catalogue.* Museums Victoria Collections. https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/16935

Figure 1: Mary Featherston's Children's Museum archive at Mary's home in Ivanhoe, Victoria, prior to its transfer to the Museums Victoria archives, 7 May 2019. Museums Victoria Archives [DOC/19/9579]; photographer: Nik McGrath.

Figure 2: Mary Featherston's Children's Museum archive at Mary's home in Ivanhoe, Victoria, prior to its transfer to the Museums Victoria archives, 7 May 2019. Museums Victoria Archives [DOC/19/9579]; photographer: Nik McGrath.

Mary Featherston AM is an Australian interior designer specialising in the design of learning spaces for children. Grant Featherston (1922-1995) co-designed Children's Museum exhibitions with Mary, and his work is documented in the Children's Museum concept report (1984) and in Children's Museum exhibitions designed by Mary and Grant. Following several months of Judy's initial research in the archives, myself and Belinda Borg, manager of records and archives at Museums Victoria, visited Mary's home in May 2019 to appraise her personal archive, which was meticulously indexed and stored in archive boxes. Mary's Children's Museum archive includes 15 boxes and a bundle of large format items, including exhibition production drawings, posters and layouts.

Work on Mary's digital images was somewhat delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the transfer of the physical records finally occurred in March 2023. I worked with Rosemary Wrench, project manager within the strategic information and compliance department at Museums Victoria, to create a finding aid for the physical Children's Museum records available on Museums Victoria's Collections Online website.[2]

Figure 3: Mary Featherston, Judy McKinty and Nik McGrath at Melbourne Museum on the day of the transfer of Mary's Children's Museum archive to the Museums Victoria archives, 29 March 2023. Museums Victoria Archives [DOC/23/1757]; photographer unknown.

2 McGrath, N., & Wrench, R. (2024). *Archives – Museums Victoria archives finding aid – Children's Museum physical records (1982–1997).* Museums Victoria Collections.

Children at the museum

The Children's Museum opened on 29 September 1985, but it was not the first space dedicated to children at the museum. Almost 70 years previously, on 8 May 1917, the National Museum of Victoria (now Museums Victoria) opened the Children's Room — the first of its kind in any museum in Australia. In the 1918 Trustees Annual Report it was noted:

> *The Children's Room, which is the first one arranged in connection with any Australian Museum, was opened on the 8th May, 1917, by Miss Adelaide Stanley, in the presence of His Excellency the Governor, Sir Arthur Stanley, and Lady Stanley. The object in view is for the younger children to enter, and by means of an attractive display of specially selected objects, changed from time to time, to excite their interest and curiosity, and encourage a taste for nature study. The collection consists of mammals, birds, fishes, shells, and insects, mounted and arranged in cases of a height suitable for children, each object or group being accompanied by short, simply-worded descriptions. The life-histories of insects are shown by living larvae, with their natural food plant, undergoing their changes into pupae and perfect insects. A limited number of the commoner species of native wild flowers are also shown in season. Its advantages as a means of imparting instruction in nature study has been recognised and availed of by school teachers with their junior classes.*[3]

The Children's Room provided a space within the museum for children to access collections, objects and information in an environment specially created for them. The Children's Room existed until 1941, when the space was given to the National Gallery of Victoria's drawing school. The 1941 Trustees Annual Report noted: '*It is hoped that the Government will provide money to house the displaced collections in a building adjoining the National Museum*'.[4] The Children's Room was reopened in 1945 and a few years later closed its doors again. (The exact date of its dismantling is unknown.)[5]

Several decades later, in 1982, Mary and Grant Featherston were commissioned to write a concept proposal for a Children's Museum. In a concept report for stakeholders, written in 1984, Mary created a series of early concept drawings that illustrated ideas for potential interaction and engagement with children's exhibits. In 1985 the Children's Museum opened its first exhibition, *EveryBody*, about the human body. The hugely popular *EveryBody* began travelling around Victoria in 1988, the same year the Children's Museum's second exhibition—*You're IT!*, about children's traditional games—was launched. In 1989 a Colour Room opened with prototype exhibits for a major colour exhibition. From 1990, the Children's Museum moved around within the Museum of Victoria, with *EveryBody* and *You're IT!* sharing the same gallery. In 1993 *You're IT!* closed

3 Trustees of the Public Library, Museums, and National Gallery of Victoria (1918). *Report of the trustees of the public library, museums, and National Gallery of Victoria, for 1917.* https://webresource.parliament.vic.gov.au/VPARL1918No6.pdf

4 Trustees of the Public Library, Museums, and National Gallery of Victoria (1941). *Report of the trustees of the public library, museums, and National Gallery of Victoria, for 1940*.

5 Pescott, R. (1945). *OLDERSYSTEM~00017 MV archives – National Museum of Victoria – general – children's museums 1944 – 1948.* Museums Victoria Archives.

Figure 4: Birds exhibited in cases placed at children's height in the Children's Room at the National Museum of Victoria, 1928. Museums Victoria [MM 47278]; photographer unknown.

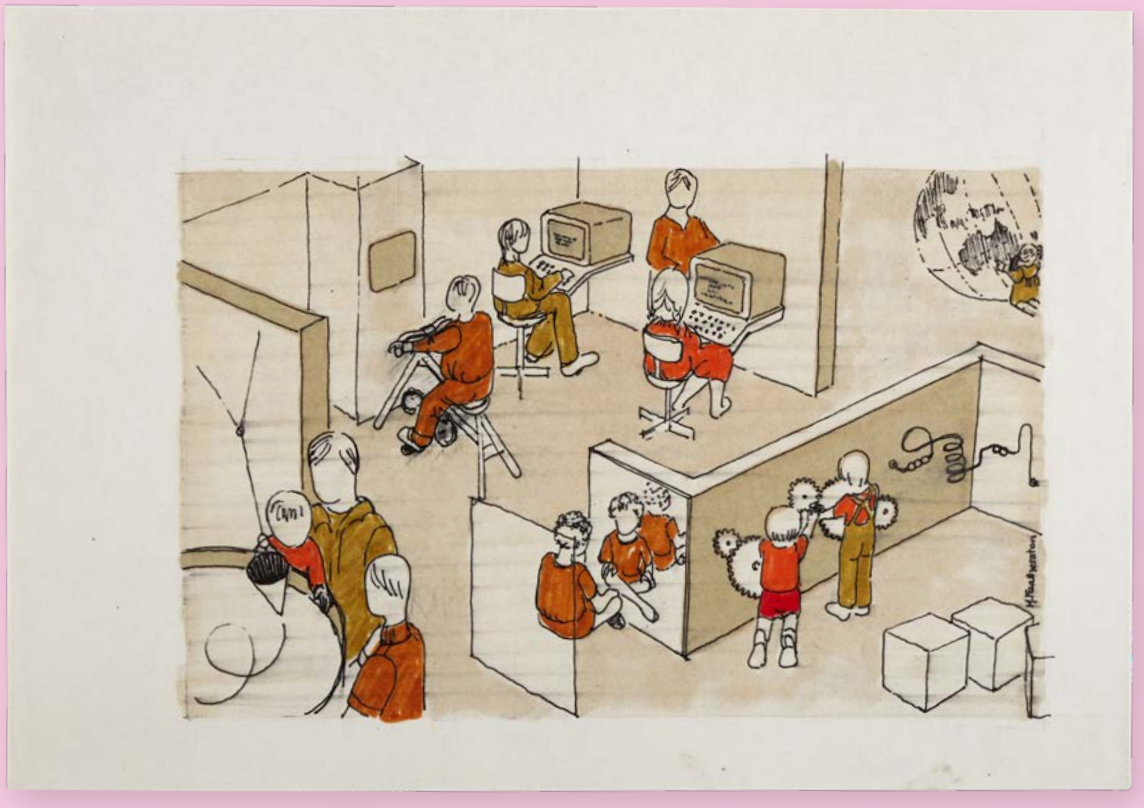

Figure 5: Mary Featherston's early concept development drawing for the proposed Children's Museum, illustrating potential visitor interactions with interactive exhibits including computers, 1984. Museums Victoria Archive [ARCHIVE-1333]; artist: Mary Featherston; © Mary Featherston.

Figure 4: Mary Featherston's early concept development drawing for the proposed Children's Museum, illustrating visitors interacting with museum collections and a study space for children in the Discovery Room, 1984. Museums Victoria Archives [ARCHIVE-1333]; artist: Mary Featherston; © Mary Featherston.

and *What about WATER?* opened in the gallery with *EveryBody*, remaining open until 1997 when the Children's Museum and the Museum of Victoria closed their doors at 328 Swanston Street ahead of a move to Carlton Gardens.

The Children's Museum (1985–97) featured many firsts throughout its 12 years of operations and was considered innovative within the sector. Mary included computers in her early concept drawings, to be used as interactive learning tools for children within exhibition spaces. Adopting computers in this way was pioneering, and other exhibits were designed to encourage curiosity, exploration and interaction. *What about WATER?* included a tank of live exhibits and a water cycle exhibit that produced rain inside the museum. Controversially, real human organs, the skeleton of a child and a family of life-sized naked sculptures were displayed in the *EveryBody* exhibition, in response to children's requests to see the 'real' human body. Although some exhibits may have been controversial, explainers were employed to help children interpret complex subject matter and to answer their questions. The Children's Museum was innovatively expanding learning opportunities for young audiences.

Significant material in the Children's Museum archive

It is valuable for an archivist to work directly with the person who created the records within an archive. I had this unique experience when working directly with Mary Featherston and Judy McKinty on the Children's Museum archive. Mary has always kept records as part of her professional practice as a designer, and this was applied to the whole development process for the content and interpretation of Children's Museum exhibitions. The documentation in the Children's Museum archive reflects Mary's keen interest in the relationship between children, learning and design. Mary documented and retained her correspondence, meeting minutes, proposal documents, reports, research and development records and exhibition documentation (including concept drawings, exhibit design, staffing, programmes, visitor comments, audience statistics, reflections, images and layouts).

With the transfer of Mary's archive to the Museums Victoria archives, along with an accompanying illustrated catalogue by Mary and Judy, we are fortunate to now hold significant material relating to the history of the Children's Museum. This collection is further substantiated with administrative records created by the former manager of the Children's Museum, Ingrid Tadich, and Museum Directorate records.

Conclusion

Following the closure of the Children's Museum, Mary Featherston's design practice continued. Lessons from the Children's Museum have informed Mary's work in the design of learning spaces in schools. In January 2025, Mary brought a group of teachers from Princes Hill Primary School to Melbourne Museum for a workshop, which included a tour of the Museums Victoria archives to view material from the Children's Museum archive, followed by a tour of the Children's Gallery. Teachers and educators continue to learn from concepts established in the Children's Museum in the 1980s and 90s. Judy McKinty's work with the Children's Museum led to a career

in children's play research and her role as a Museums Victoria honorary associate, working with the Australian Children's Folklore Collection.

Archive available for access

Mary Featherston's Children's Museum archive is accessible via the Museums Victoria website: Contact us - Museums Victoria. This valuable collection is held in a central repository, to be kept permanently for researchers to access into the future. It is a resource for educators and others to learn from the innovations developed by Mary and her collaborators during the life of the Children's Museum.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the contributions made by Judy McKinty and Mary Featherston to this article, and all the work they have contributed for many years to the Children's Museum, and more broadly to research, design and development in their respective fields of expertise. I would like to thank both Judy and Mary for their mentorship and support in the work I do at Museums Victoria.

DR DZAVID HAVERIC

Reflections of a research associate at Museums Victoria

Museums Victoria is one of Australia's treasure-houses, cherishing a priceless collection and undertaking research of national and international significance across its history and technology, First Peoples and sciences departments. Among the collections managed by history and technology is the migration and cultural diversity collection, which reflects Victoria's history of immigration and cultural diffusion.

Until recently, however, relatively few items in the collection appeared to reflect Muslim communities and Islamic culture. Identifying relevant material in the collection — and further building it — is important for community wellbeing, engagement and the balanced representation of Victorian communities.

Hoping to contribute to the museum's collections and research in these areas, I joined Museums Victoria as a research associate in 2015, while an adjunct research fellow at Charles Sturt University.

It was both an honour and a challenge to undertake this work. I started from scratch — step by step, day by day, year by year — and gradually built my contribution to Museums Victoria's collections. Over time my work broadened to other museums, universities, libraries and communities.

My project titled 'Muslims in Australia' identified material and stories that contributed to two of my books on the subject.[1] My later project, 'Muslims and their descendants in the Australian Military', evolved into a book on the history of Muslims in Australia's armed forces.[2]

These projects have made a nationally significant contribution to the historical and cultural understanding of Islam and Muslims in Australia. They underline the importance of originality, creativity, inclusivity, diversity and discovery in the Australian sociohistorical context — far beyond a merely theological interpretation.

1 Haveric, D. (2019). *History of Islam and Muslims in Australia*. Lambert Academic Publishing; Haveric, D. (2019). Muslims making Australia home: *Immigration and community building*. Melbourne University Publishing.

2 Haveric, D. (2024). *A history of Muslims in the Australian military from 1885 to 1945*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

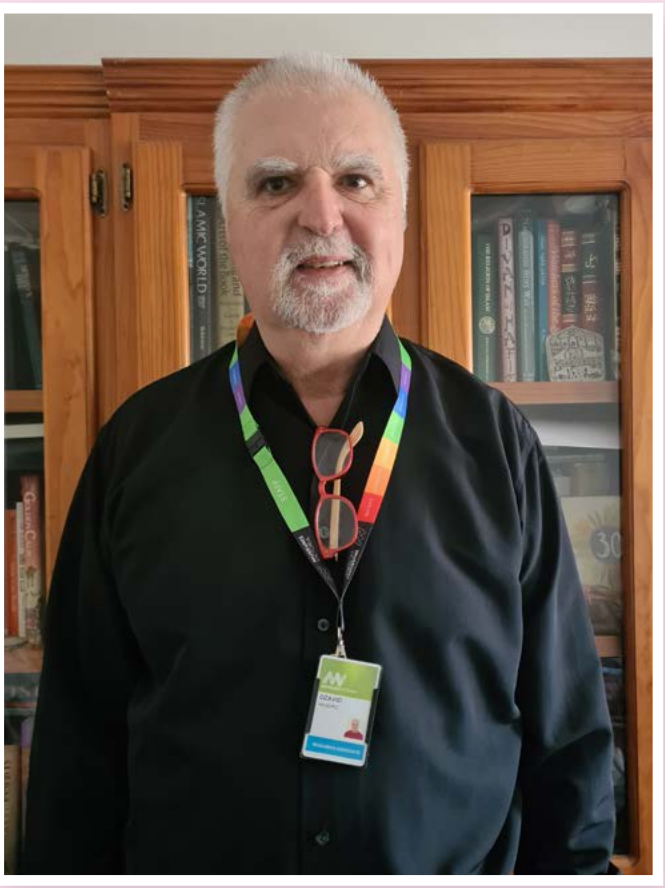

Figure 1: Dr Dzavid Haveric, Geelong, 2025. Dr Dzavid Haveric; photographer: Aida Haveric.

My research at the museum has provided collaborative opportunities, including the identifying of historical collections for future acquisition, such as documents and images; the possibility of the museum becoming the repository for my projects' oral history collection; and expanding existing Collections Online records and narratives. Collectively, these outcomes promote understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim cultures and histories, and demonstrate the distinctiveness of the Islamic culture that is part of the cultural diversity of Australia.

During my research at the museum, I have maintained fruitful cooperation with Dr Moya McFadzean, senior curator of migration and cultural diversity and more recently with Deborah Tout-Smith, senior curator of home and community.
I have relished opportunities to consult and share information with them, to display findings and to discuss my research, especially after field trips. I value their continuing curatorial interest and academic support.

In the museum, I have worked not only on stories, but also on valuable image and object records in the museum's EMu collection database. I have enjoyed being part of the museum's back-of-house team and interacting with history and technology department colleagues. Visiting exhibitions, attending tours and relaxing with colleagues in the café are other benefits in the life of the research associate.

Muslims in Australia

At the time I started my research in 2015, there was no comprehensive history of Islam and Muslims in Australia, except for a couple of brief histories or popular accounts which focused on particular ethnic groups — most notably Christine Stevens's work on Afghan settlers in Australia.[3] An exception was a Museums Victoria travelling exhibition book, which covered aspects of the post-war multiethnic Muslim community.[4]

In 2015, my project 'History of Islam and Muslims in Australia' was funded by the Centre for Public and Contextual Theology at Charles Sturt University. My approach — from a sociohistorical viewpoint — embraced people of diverse ethnic backgrounds going back almost 1,000 years. The project spans the early Muslim exploration of Australia to the centuries-old visits by Macassan traders from Indonesia prior to the establishment of the Australian colonies. This period was followed by the arrival of Afghans and Indians to the Australian continent, until the mid-twentieth century when multiethnic Muslim immigration began. The research explored, for the first time, the history of Islam and Muslims in Australia.[5]

As this project deepened and broadened my knowledge about Muslims in Australia, I began to develop the concept for a museum-focused project. I approached the museum with the idea of a formal research relationship and within months was accepted as a research associate. I received valuable academic support from Dr Moya McFadzean, and at the same time developed relationships with Muslim community organisations and leading Muslim community representatives.

I was able to visit a range of community settings, such as mosques, Islamic centres, historical societies and social clubs, as well as state museums, libraries and archives, and I consulted with a range of scholars. The network I developed was very useful for building stories and understanding social and cultural contexts.

This work led me to my second research focus, developing into the book *Muslims making Australia home: immigration and community building*.[6] This work covers a significant gap in the history of Australia, particularly the history of Islam and Muslims in Australia from World War II to the 1980s. Multiethnicity and Muslim memories play a central feature in the work, which includes images, first-person remarks and archival data. In collaboration with the museum, significant information and photographs were selected as a focus for the 'Muslims in Australia' project.

I found that Muslims have long wanted to familiarise themselves with Australia, and also to familiarise Australia with them. The 'Muslims in Australia' project is intended to showcase the stories of Australian Muslims: who they are and what they stand for. In my book *Muslims making Australia home*, I state, *'There is no history of Islam in Australia without a history of Muslim communities; there is no history of these Muslim*

3 Stevens, C. (2002). *Tin mosques and ghantowns: A history of Afghan camel drivers in Australia*. Paul Fitzsimons.

4 Jones, M. L., & Kazi, A. K. (1993). *An Australian pilgrimage: Muslims in Australia from the seventeenth century to the present*. Victoria Press in association with Museums Victoria.

5 Haveric, D. (2019). *History of Islam and Muslims in Australia*. Lambert Academic Publishing.

6 Haveric, D. (2019). *Muslims making Australia home: Immigration and community building*. Melbourne University Publishing.

Figure 2: Book launch, 2019. Islamic Museum of Australia; photographer: staff member of the Islamic Museum of Australia. © Islamic Museum of Australia.

communities without the memories of Australian Muslims.'[7] Thus, the project preserves memories and photos from the Muslim past — memories shaped into stories that can be best understood in a multicultural context, since Australian Muslims share their cultural qualities with other Australians. Within Australia's culturally religious, pluralistic mosaic there can be no history of the Muslim faith that does not explore the universal values shared with other faiths and cultures.

Among a number of interviewees for the museum's image collection were Professor Abdul Kazi, of Pakistani origin and a leading Islamic scholar in Australia; Janeth Deen OAM, a *Begum* (Muslim woman of 'high rank') of Indian heritage, who I respectfully call my 'Australian Muslim community mother'; the scholar Kinda alSamara from Syria; and Sefkija Imamovic, a son of Bosnian Ishak Imamovic, who was the first Muslim *Kadi* (judge) in Australia and author of the very fine book *Outline of Islamic Doctrine*. Besides these interviews, which are now preserved in the collection, I was able to interview possibly the last surviving Indonesian Colombo Plan student in Australia, Denny Satria Daud, who is now in his 90s.[8]

With valuable images and immigration stories, Museums Victoria's online collection provides information about the experiences of people who pulled up their roots and came to Australia to start a new life. The collection now includes important stories of Muslim settlement, social integration and cohesion in the rich multicultural

7 Ibid, pp. 93–94.

8 McFadzean, M. (2019). Muslims in Australia Image Collection. Museums Victoria Collections https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/16673

Figure 3: Book launch, 2019. Islamic Museum of Australia; photographer: staff member of the Islamic Museum of Australia. © Islamic Museum of Australia.

Figure 5: Dr Dzavid Haveric with Professor Peter Stanley, 2020. National Library of Australia; photographer: staff member of the National Library of Australia. © National Library of Australia.

Figure 4: Dr Dzavid Haveric in Renmark, SA, 2021. Dr Dzavid Haveric; photographer: Ray Hartigan, Chairman of the RSL Club, Renmark.

Figure 6: Zada Brothers with their father Khan Zada. Shamroze and Janet Shamroze, the Broken Hill Mosque, 2021; photographer unknown.

landscape of Australia. It was particularly gratifying that the project outcomes were shared during an SBS Radio program in 2019 with Dr McFadzean.[9]

Muslims and their descendants in the Australian military

Building on my work for the 'Muslims in Australia' project, I turned my focus to another under-researched field: Muslims and their descendants in the Australian military forces.

It is surprising to many Australians that Muslims and their descendants took part in Australian military expeditions in Sudan, in the Boer Wars and in both World Wars. My new project explored many historical sources for evidence of Australian Muslim service and confirmed that Muslims fought alongside other Australians for reasons of patriotism, loyalty and the opportunity to contribute to Australia. Their stories testify to their involvement in the rich military history of Australia.

My research and subsequent book *A history of Muslims in the Australian military from 1885 to 1945: Loyalty, patriotism, contribution*[10] was supported financially by the Australian Army History Unit, the Department of Defence, Charles Sturt University and the Multicultural Foundation of Australia. I received academic support from Dr Moya McFadzean and Deborah Tout-Smith, and scholars in the field, such as Professor Peter Stanley, also encouraged my work on this significant project.

After digging for dispersed and unidentified soldiers' data from sources including military records in the National Archives of Australia, the National Library of Australia, the Australian War Memorial, a number of Returned and Services League of Australia (RSL) clubs, army museums, historical societies and cemeteries, I found that Muslim fathers, brothers and sisters were involved in Australian military forces. They served in World War I in the 1st Australian Imperial Force (AIF), and in World War II in the Australian Army, the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and the Merchant Navy (MN). For the first time in Australian history, I found Muslims of many different ethnic backgrounds, and also several women of Islamic background. This inspired me to write an article for the museum, now published on Collections Online, titled 'Anzac Day: an Australian Muslim Commemoration'.[11] In 2023, I was interviewed about my field trip experiences for the museum members publication, *Discover*.

The discovery of the Muslim heritage of Australian soldiers and their experience in the military has led to my current work, which is selecting and shaping stories and unique images for Museums Victoria's migration and cultural diversity collection. This project will continue to broaden the collection, enriching content for future generations across Australia and beyond.

9 Haveric, D., McFadzean, M. (2019, September 22). Muslims in Australia, arrival and settlement [Radio Broadcast]. SBS Bosnian. https://www.sbs.com.au/language/bosnian/en/podcast-episode/muslims-in-australia-arrival-and-settlement-museum-victoria/pbtxbju9c

10 Haveric, D. (2024). *A history of Muslims in the Australian military from 1885 to 1945: Loyalty, patriotism, contribution.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

11 Haveric, D. (2024). *Anzac Day: An Australian Muslim commemoration*. Museums Victoria Collections https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/17701

JADE HADFIELD | NGĀTI KAHUNGUNU, NGĀTI WHĀTUA KI KAIPARA

Honouring ancestors: A Māori approach to the Moana Wansolwara Collection at Museums Victoria

Pepeha

Maunganui ki tai,
titiro ki ua ki Tutamoe,
tapapa iho ki waenganui,
ko toku awa korero,
ko Kai hu e rere ana.
ko Jade Hadfield toku ingoa.

Maunganui stands to the tide,
looking inland to our mountain Tutamoe,
down to my speaking river that flows on, Kaihu.
My name is Jade Hadfield.

For many non-Indigenous people, it is hard to grasp what it is like for Indigenous people to walk into collection stores. There is a common misconception that these items are just objects — no different from a random piece of wood on a shelf. For Indigenous peoples, museum collection stores are not just repositories of objects; they are spaces of deep ancestral presence and responsibility. Taonga, or cultural treasures, are our ancestors, and we see them lying dormant in cold museum collection stores.[1]

Within the Moana Wansolwara Collection (previously called the Pacific Cultures Collection), currently housed at Museums Victoria, lies approximately 20,000 cultural items and over 8,000 images representing the deep whakapapa (genealogy) of peoples from the Great Ocean.[2] These taonga carry the stories and mauri (life principle) of our tīpuna (ancestors), woven into their craftsmanship, their purpose and their journey across time. However, the way these taonga came to be held in a colonial institution reflects a history of invasion, extraction and disruption.

1 'Our' and 'we' referring to myself and the collective communities from the Moana.

2 Allen, L., & Gillespie, R. (2012). *Collection plan: Pacific cultures 2013-8*.

The historical disposition of these cultural items traces back to the 1860s, initiated by Sir Redmond Barry's collection of objects from Fiji. Over the years, missionaries, colonial administrators, anthropologists and traders have amassed taonga, often devoid of the maker's name or the guardianship of their rightful keepers. Some items entered collections through trade or coercion, and many as spoils of war. Despite the colonial legacy tethered to these items, they persist as living embodiments of our ancestry, imbued with mātauranga (knowledge). These treasures serve as cultural markers associated with place, time and familial ties, bridging the generational divide while embodying the interwoven trade networks that flourished across the Great Ocean. The collection spans items ranging from finely woven feathered cloaks of Aotearoa to tapa cloths from the broader Moana (Great Ocean), intricate navigational charts from Micronesia and sacred Malangan masks from New Ireland. The collection also encompasses over 550 waka (canoes) and paddles, symbols of our enduring voyaging expertise, which continue to connect us across extensive waters. Ultimately, this collection transcends mere archival status; it embodies a living expression of our past, present and future. The museum houses these taonga physically, but their wairua (spirit) remains in need of nurture, and this can be achieved by connecting the collection to community.

The Moana has long been a place of mythmaking, with stories of Western imaginings, exotic dusky maidens and discovery, when in fact it is a place where we have navigated, traded, loved and practiced culture for thousands of years.[3] It is often misconceived in Western discourse as small and isolated; however, scholars such as Epeli Hau'ofa remind us that we hail from the Moana — a network of islands threaded together by vast oceans — asserting a kinship that encompasses a third of the world's surface.[4] Pasifika communities reflect the rich diversity and uniqueness of their ocean island homes, each with its own culture, language and traditions. Engaging with the Moana Wansolwara Collection in a Victorian context is essential for cultural continuance, community wellbeing and the ongoing development, maintenance and care of these collections.

As a wahine Māori (Māori woman) from Aotearoa New Zealand, raised on whenua (land/Country) by my grandparents, who imparted to me the teachings of tikanga (correct procedures), I use this knowledge to navigate both the physical and spiritual realms that the taonga occupies. When caring for the Moana Wansolwara collection, my approach is rooted in the principles of tikanga, mauri (life principle) and the dual concepts of tapu (sacredness) and noa (free from tapu). Tikanga serves as a vital framework, guiding my interactions and providing the necessary protocols for honouring our ancestral items. The notion of mauri is essential to fostering relationships with taonga, understanding them as living entities rather than static items.

At the heart of this approach lies the concept of kaitiakitanga, an Indigenous philosophy of guardianship that underscores the interconnectedness defining all

3 Eshrāghi, L. (2022). *Indigenous aesthetics and knowledges for Great Ocean renaissances*. Common Room;
Lopesi, L. (2018). *False divides*. Bridget Williams Books; and
Tamaira, A.M. (2010). From full dusk to full tusk: Reimagining the 'dusky maiden' through the visual arts. *The Contemporary Pacific, 22*(1), 1–35. https://doi.org/10.1353/cp.0.0087

4 Finney, B. (2002). The other one-third of the globe. In F. Spier & P. W. Blank (Eds.), *Defining the Pacific: Opportunities and constraints* (pp. 25–50). Routledge.

existence. In the museum collection context, kaitiaki (guardians) serve as carers, bridging the physical and spiritual realms while safeguarding not only the cultural objects but the communities they are connected to. This guardianship entails a profound responsibility to maintain a living connection between people and their taonga, preserving the emotional and spiritual bonds that connect us to our ancestors and their legacies.

To navigate this complex landscape, I employ wayfinding methodology, a cultural practice steeped in ancestral navigation techniques, which enables respectful engagement. This methodology is not simply about movement through physical spaces; it embodies adaptability, collaborative processes and a deep respect for whakapapa. By utilising this practice, I aspire to promote an environment grounded in cultural safety, where Pasifika needs are acknowledged and centred.

This autoethnographic paper emerges from a distinctly Māori perspective and represents my approach to the Moana Wansolwara Collection through the intertwined frameworks of tikanga, mauri, tapu and noa, kaitiakitanga, and wayfinding methodologies — all underpinned by a robust cultural safety framework. By embedding these principles in my engagement, I aim to centre Pasifika people and culture while honouring our ancestors and indigenising museum practices.

Moana Wansolwara

Indigeneity serves as the nucleus of my life and work — an effort aimed at centring our narratives while moving away from imposed colonial lexicons. Language is inherently tied to the process of indigenisation of cultural domains, shaping our identity and the way our stories are told.[5] A crucial aspect of working with our collection at Museums Victoria was selecting a name that appropriately reflected and centred indigeneity, with a deliberate shift towards prioritising language. During the Te Pasifika Redevelopment Project at Museums Victoria (2018–20), we sought a name for the collection that truly represented the people of Oceania — one that foregrounded our language and identity. This aligned with a broader regional movement to move away from imposed names and reclaim our own narratives.

For example, during a talanoa (open, inclusive dialogue) held in Aotearoa for the Creative New Zealand-funded exploration of the publication *Crafting Aotearoa: A cultural history of making in New Zealand and the wider Moana Oceania*, significant discourse emerged regarding the nomenclature attached to our oceanic realms. While the term Moana (Great Ocean) resonates across various Pacific nations, its applicability diminishes in the face of the region's linguistic diversity. The editors noted that '*Moana means ocean in Māori and connects to other islands such as the Cook Islands, Hawai'i, Sāmoa and Tonga*,'[6] though this does not capture the entirety of Oceania's linguistic richness. Here in Victoria, this same conversation emerged during the Te Pasifika Redevelopment Project. Voices, particularly from the Papua New Guinea diaspora,

5 Parajuli, B. (2021). Role of language in shaping cultural identity. *Marsyangdi Journal, 2*, (pp. 112–18) https://doi.org/10.3126/mj.v2i1.39970; Smith, L. T. (2015). Kaupapa Māori research — some Kaupapa Māori principles. In L. Pihama & K. South (Eds.), *Kaupapa Rangahau: A reader.: A collection of readings from the Kaupapa Maori research workshop series* (pp. 46–52). Te Kotahi Research Institute.

6 Chitham, K., Skinner, D., & Uafā Māhina-Tuai, K. (n.d.). *Why "Moana Oceania"?*. Lagi-Maama Academy & Consultancy.

articulated a kinship with the term 'Wansolwara' — translated as 'one saltwater'. Following extensive consultation, including discussions with key Elders from the Victoria-based Papua New Guinea community, the collective consensus designated the name Moana Wansolwara (Great Ocean One Saltwater) as a more inclusive representation for a region encompassing over 2,500 languages. This movement to prioritise Indigenous languages and worldviews reflects a growing trend across institutions. The Australian Museum adopted a similar term, Wansolmoana (one salt ocean) to honour Indigenous perspectives, indicating a broader shift towards reclaiming identity and recognition of our communities' connectedness throughout Te Moana Nui a Kiwa (the Great Ocean). In addition to recentring language, Indigenous concepts and practices are also necessary when considering the Moana Wansolwara Collection.

Figure 1: Moana Wansolwara Collection, 2025. Moana Wansolwara Collection, Museums Victoria; photographer: Gregory Doyle.

Kaitiakitanga: guardianship and responsibility within te ao Māori (Māori worldview)

Kaitiakitanga, a fundamental Māori principle of guardianship and sustainability, plays a vital role in preserving the cultural and spiritual significance of taonga. Our worldview posits that interconnectedness defines all existence, shaping our understanding of the natural world through the interplay of Papatūānuku (Earth Mother), Ranginui (Sky Father), and their descendants, including Tangaroa (guardian of the oceans). These atua (deities) oversee different aspects of nature, and as ira tangata (humans), we are entrusted with the role of kaitiaki — caretakers responsible for protecting and sustaining the land, waters and all living things.

Kaitiakitanga is an active, intergenerational responsibility. It is guided by mātauranga Māori (traditional Māori knowledge), which is passed down through observation, experience and a profound connection to place. This knowledge informs careful resource management, ensuring a balance between use and preservation so that future generations can continue to thrive.

An essential part of kaitiakitanga is the connection between people and their taonga. In a museum setting, maintaining a meaningful connection between people and their taonga requires recognising the deep interrelationship between tāngata (people) and their environment. This perspective reflects both a spiritual duty and a practical responsibility to care for cultural heritage, the land and its resources, ensuring that future generations continue to benefit from this stewardship.[7]

Museums serve a multifaceted role in this context. As custodians of taonga, museums are not only responsible for preservation but also function as spaces for cultural engagement. By facilitating access and connection to taonga, the museum can eventually provide the opportunity for Pasifika to exercise kaitiakitanga through the repatriation and care of their taonga.[8] Involving communities in the processes of curation and display enhances the narratives surrounding taonga, reinforcing the principles of kaitiakitanga — particularly the emphasis on interconnectedness between all life forms.[9]

Furthermore, addressing the colonial legacies embedded in museum practices and elevating Indigenous perspectives allows these institutions to move beyond preservation alone. By actively promoting tikanga Māori (Māori customs and values) and Indigenous self-determination, museums not only safeguard cultural heritage but also empower communities to reclaim and share their histories on their own terms.[10]

7 McAllister, T., Hikuroa, D., & Macinnis-Ng, C. (2023). Connecting science to Indigenous knowledge: Kaitiakitanga, conservation, and resource management. *New Zealand Journal of Ecology, 47*(1). https://doi.org/10.20417/nzjecol.47.3521;
Pomare, M. (2006). Kaitiakitanga: Mā te whānau tonu pea, e taurima? In E. Moore (Ed.), *Puna maumahara: Rōpu tuku iho repositories* (pp. 8–22). Te Wānanga o Raukawa;
Walker, E., Jowett, T., Whaanga, H., & Wehi, P. (2024). Cultural stewardship in urban spaces: Reviving Indigenous knowledge for the restoration of nature. *People and Nature, 6*(4), 1696–712. https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10683

8 Hutchings, J., Smith, J., Taura, Y., Harmsworth, G., & Awatere, S. (2020). Storying kaitiakitanga: Exploring kaupapa Māori land and water food stories. *MAI Journal, 9*(3), 183–94. https://doi.org/10.20507/MAIJournal.2020.9.3.1; Nolan, S. R. (2022). Kaitiakitanga: Utilising Māori holistic conservation in heritage institutions. *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies, 20*(1). https://doi.org/10.5334/jcms.215

9 Te Aika, B., Liggins, L., Rye, C., Perkins, E. O., Huh, J., Brauning, R., Godfery, T., & Black, M. A. (2023). Aotearoa genomic data repository: An āhuru mōwai for taonga species sequencing data. *Molecular Ecology Resources, 25*(2). https://doi.org/10.1111/1755-0998.13866

10 Rameka, L. K., Soutar, B., Clayton, L., & Card, A. (2022). Whakapūmau te mana: Implications for early childhood practice. *New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work*, 19(1), 46–61. https://doi.org/10.24135/teacherswork.v19i1.340; Virens, A. (2023). From the mountains to the sea — Ki uta ki tai: Ecological enclosure, interconnection, and subjectivity in the commons. *Antipode, 55*(4), 1275–93. https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12931

Figure 2: Kaitiaki, 2025. Moana Wansolwara Collection, Museums Victoria; photographer: Gregory Doyle.

Figure 3: Sharing mauri with a nineteenth century kaitaka (a type of highly prized Māori cloak), 2025. Moana Wansolwara Collection, Museums Victoria; photographer: Gregory Doyle.

At its core, the practice of kaitiakitanga in museums embodies the principle of relational stewardship — a recognition that every taonga is not just an artefact, but a living connection to ancestors, identity and the natural world.

Caring for our ancestors, navigating the sacred: tikanga, mauri, tapu and noa

Tikanga encapsulates the essence of doing things correctly,[11] implying a philosophy rooted in ethics and the management of relationships within collective frameworks. It illustrates how groups can interact harmoniously and outlines the ways individuals define their identities. This framework of conduct is essential for nurturing the living connections we maintain with the taonga in our care.

The interconnectedness of tikanga, mauri, tapu and noa forms a crucial framework within Māori philosophy and cultural practices. Tikanga, often defined as the customary norms and values of Māori society, serves as the guiding framework for understanding mauri, tapu — the sacred life force inherent in all beings — and the concept of noa, which represents the state of being free from restrictions or sacredness. This relationship emphasises the importance of balance and context in Māori worldviews that govern daily life and cultural practices.[12]

The concept of mauri, often viewed as the essence of life itself, is central to our role as guardians, underscoring the importance of keeping the spirit alive.[13] I envision mauri as a luminous thread interconnecting all life forms — spanning beings, flora, oceans and land — bridging existence across the cosmos. The concept of mauri is reflected throughout the Moana, as Elsdon Best demonstrated by collecting and publishing an array of languages that connect throughout Samoa, Tahiti, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea.[14] Taonga, perceived as living entities, are imbued with the mauri of their creators or those who share an indelible connection to them.

Woven throughout this discourse is the delicate balance between tapu and noa. Within the Moana Wansolwara Collection, this intersection demands a deep awareness of the spiritual presence embedded within taonga. I approach this with the same reverence I would an urupā (Māori family cemetery), acknowledging ancestral spirits and recognising that museum practices must navigate both tapu and noa with care.

Tapu is intrinsic to both taonga and people, binding them to their whakapapa and the natural world. For this reason, preparation before entering such sacred spaces is essential. When guiding community members through collection store visits, I emphasise the importance of protection, both physical and spiritual, ensuring they are emotionally prepared before encountering their ancestral cultural items. This preparation may include offering an opportunity for karakia (an incantation) or a clearing ritual, creating a conduit for spiritual guidance and protection. Given the

11 Mead, S. (2003). *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori values*. Huia Publishers.

12 Dell, K., Staniland, N., & Nicholson, A. (2018). Economy of mana: Where to next? *MAI Journal: A New Zealand Journal of Indigenous Scholarship, 7*(1). https://doi.org/10.20507/maijournal.2018.7.1.5;
Lyver, P. O'B., Richardson, S. J., Gormley, A. M., Timoti, P., Jones, C. J., & Tahi, B. L. (2018). Complementarity of Indigenous and Western scientific approaches for monitoring forest state. *Ecological Applications, 28*(7), 1909–23. https://doi.org/10.1002/eap.1787

13 Barlow, C. (1990). *Tikanga whakaaro: Key concepts in Māori culture*. Oxford University Press;
Best, E. (1954). *Spiritual and mental concepts of the Māori*. Dominion Museum;
Hēnare, M. (2015). Tapu, mana, mauri, hau, wairua: A Māori philosophy of vitalism and cosmos. In C. Spiller & R. Wolfgramm (Eds.), *Indigenous spiritualities at work: Transforming the spirit of enterprise* (pp. 77–98). Information Age Publishing;

14 Best, E. (1954).

diversity of beliefs among Pasifika peoples, this process remains flexible and inclusive, respecting different practices while fostering a collective experience.

Handling taonga also requires mindfulness. While touch can facilitate the sharing of mauri, it is equally important to acknowledge the histories and potential tapu that may accompany these objects, potentially unsettling the taonga and any unwanted energy.[15] Beyond spiritual considerations, there are also physical safety concerns, including awareness of historic pesticide treatments. Respectful interaction is always encouraged, but the unknown aspects surrounding each item warrant careful consideration. Individuals are empowered to make informed choices about their engagement — whether by wearing gloves or handling taonga directly in accordance with their own cultural protocols.

Water plays a vital role in our ceremonies, neutralising tapu and restoring balance.[16] As we exit the collection store, we perform a cleansing ritual, dipping our hands in a wairua or whakanoa bowl and flicking water over ourselves, particularly the head, to transition from the sacred back to a state of noa.

Just as tikanga guides the respectful handling of taonga within collection spaces, my engagement with these collections and people is deeply relational with spiritual responsibilities, utilising Indigenous methodologies. By centring tikanga, mauri, tapu and noa, we uphold Indigenous frameworks that honour the living presence of cultural materials and the people connected to them. These protocols guide us in fostering respectful and spiritually safe encounters within the collection space. As kaitiaki, we are not only preserving taonga but sustaining the interconnected relationships that give them life, meaning and mana across generations.

Wayfinding methodologies: Navigating cultural spaces

My engagement with collections is shaped by whakapapa, whenua and the communities connected to these taonga. It is not just about physical or spiritual dimensions but about the enduring connections between people — past, present and future. Navigating these relationships requires care and cultural awareness, particularly within a diverse landscape of over 2,500 languages. To do this, I use wayfinding methodology in a metaphorical sense to help navigate the spaces between taonga, people, the physical and the spiritual. Wayfinding methodology draws on the ancestral knowledge of the navigators that guided people of the Moana across vast oceans and continues to shape how we move through the world today.

In this context, wayfinding is more than navigation; it is a way of fostering relationships between people, communities and institutions. When engaging with Pasifika communities in collection spaces, I embrace a process of ongoing kōrero (open dialogue), where perspectives are shared and trust is built over time. These encounters are not isolated interactions but part of a broader commitment to meaningful engagement, guided by wayfinding values.

Wayfinding is about instinct and flexibility: being able to read emotions and then adapt quickly if necessary. The concept of na'au — trusting instinct, emotion

15 Pomare, M. (2006).

16 Mead, S. (2003).

and intuition — reminds us that knowledge is not purely intellectual but also felt.[17] In museum spaces, this means working across different knowledge systems, fostering inclusive spaces and ensuring that relationships are nurtured with integrity and care.

Values that guide a wayfinding approach

A set of core wayfinding values underpins my approach to this work, ensuring that engagement with collections is guided by respect, responsibility and connection.

- **Humārietanga:** humility.
- **Rangatiratanga:** inspirational leadership, weaving people together to work cohesively.[18]
- **Manaakitanga:** nurturing relationships, looking after people and being very careful about how others are treated.
- **Kaitiakitanga:** our role of stewardship. It is interconnectedness — our kinship with people and environment, and the maintenance of that kinship.[19]
- **Wairuatanga:** awareness and navigation of the spiritual and physical realms.
- **Aroha:** often interpreted as love. Tai, cited in Spiller, defines aroha as a composite of aro (the life principle, thought),[20] ro (introspection, within) and ha (life force, breath). A mindful concept connected to our life force, the breath.

These values shape how I engage with communities, institutions and taonga, ensuring that relationships are built on mutual understanding and shared responsibility. Wayfinding is not just about reaching a destination; it is about the journey itself — one that is guided by the wisdom of those who have come before us and the aspirations of those who will follow. These values not only guide my engagement with communities and taonga but also inform broader practices of cultural safety.

Cultural safety: a framework for engagement

To provide clear guidance for culturally safe engagement, *We are the Ocean: A methodology for cultural safety and care of Moana Wansolwara Cultures Collections at Museums Victoria* was co-developed with Erina McCann as a living, evolving document created for the Te Pasifika Redevelopment Project at Museums Victoria. The document serves as a cultural safety framework guiding the care and management of the Moana Wansolwara Collection. It is grounded in ocean-centric and relational worldviews, recognising the diversity of Pasifika cultures and challenging the misconception of a singular 'Pacific' identity.

At its core, the framework prioritises community collaboration and embeds Indigenous knowledge systems, ensuring cultural collections are maintained in ways that honour their spiritual, historical and relational significance. *We are the Ocean*

17 Thompson, N. (n.d.). *On Wayfinding*. https://archive.hokulea.com/ike/hookele/on_wayfinding.html, accessed 8 March 2025.
18 Spiller, C., Barclay-Kerr, H., & Panoho, J. (2015). *Wayfinding leadership: Ground-breaking wisdom for developing leaders*. Huia Publishers.
19 Spiller, C. et al. (2015).
20 Spiller, C. et al. (2015).

shifts museum practice away from rigid, Western methodologies, instead embracing orality, reciprocity and holistic engagement with Moana Wansolwara communities.

Key themes of *We are the Ocean* include:

- **Holism:** recognising the interconnectedness of people, land, sea and spirit.
- **Relationality:** valuing the sacred connections between people, ancestors and objects.
- **Reciprocity and respect:** ensuring mutual exchange, ethical stewardship and cultural sensitivity.
- **Indigenous knowledge systems:** centring Indigenous philosophies like teu le va (Samoan concept of nurturing relationships) and mauri (Māori concept of life force) to guide collection care.

The framework ensures that connection to taonga is a dynamic and inclusive practice, and that Moana Wansolwara people have agency over the preservation and representation of their cultural heritage. It is envisioned as a guiding document that will continuously evolve in response to community needs, integral to the cultural safety of individuals.

Conclusion

In honouring the taonga within the Moana Wansolwara Collection at Museums Victoria, this paper has underscored the significance of using Māori concepts, wayfinding methodologies and cultural safety to navigate the collection and reconnect community, ensuring the care and respect of taonga within museum spaces and the people they are connected to. These cultural treasures are more than objects; they are living embodiments of whakapapa, carrying the mauri of our ancestors and the histories of our interconnected oceanic communities. The importance of maintaining kaitiakitanga through culturally grounded practices has been highlighted as an essential approach to sustaining both the physical and spiritual integrity of these collections.

By embedding Indigenous values such as manaakitanga, whanaungatanga and wairuatanga into museum practices, we can move beyond colonial frameworks of collection management towards a more holistic and respectful model of care. This approach not only centres Pasifika voices and worldviews but also strengthens community ties and affirms the sovereignty of Indigenous knowledge systems.

Through the Moana Wansolwara Collection, narratives are reclaimed, reinforcing the deep spiritual connections between people and their taonga. By embracing tikanga, wayfinding values and centring indigeneity, we honour our ancestors, uphold our responsibilities as guardians and ensure that taonga remain a source of identity, knowledge and inspiration for future generations. The work of indigenising museum spaces is ongoing, but as long as our taonga are housed within museums, we need to care for their physical and spiritual aspects, reflecting their enduring cultural and spiritual significance.

DR MARTIN BUSH

Centuries of stars: The history of astronomical visualisation in and out of museum collections

The centenary of the first opto-mechanical planetarium projector, the Zeiss Mk 1, fell not quite two years ago.[1] In October 1923, on a rooftop in Jena, Germany, a public audience felt the *'illusion of infinite space'*[2] as the stars and planets were represented with points of light on a domed surface that appeared to have *'been rolled away, revealing the sky'*.[3] This device, able to dial up the appearance of the night sky for any date in the past or the future, was a mechanical wonder of the modern world. Perhaps *'the most important single device for popularising astronomy since the early twentieth century'*, it was yet just the latest in a line of astronomical visualisation technologies that had stretched back centuries.[4] In the hundred years that have followed the first outing of the Zeiss Mk 1, planetariums have continued to evolve, including a diminishing number of opto-mechanical projectors but the addition of high-definition video, lasers and, recently, solid-state screens. All of these are building on the visualisation traditions of the past.

Remaining within collections around the world — including those of Museums Victoria — are many older technologies of display, including mechanical orreries and astronomical lantern slides. Other technologies of popular astronomy, such as the transparent orrery, or Eidouranion, have been lost almost entirely, recorded only in printed memories and artefactual reflections. New devices have always built on older ones — the first opto-mechanical planetarium projector, the Zeiss Mk 1, was itself

1 For more on this centenary, see Bush, M., & Hill, T. (2025). For 100 years, we have marvelled at planetariums. Here's a brief history of how humans brought the stars indoors. https://theconversation.com/for-100-years-we-have-marvelled-at-planetariums-heres-a-brief-history-of-how-humans-brought-the-stars-indoors-255228; McMahon, M., Raposo, P., Smail, M. & Boyce-Jacino, K. (2024). 100 years of planetaria: 100 stories of people, places and devices. Springer Praxis Books.

2 Marche, J. (2005). *Theaters of time and space: American planetaria, 1930–1970*. Rutgers University Press.

3 Love, G. (1939, October 23), Theatre of the Stars. *Pittsburgh Press*, p.18.

4 Bigg, C. (2017). The view from here, there and nowhere? Situating the observer in the planetarium and in the solar system. *Early Popular Visual Culture, 15*(2), pp. 204–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/17460654.2017.1323409

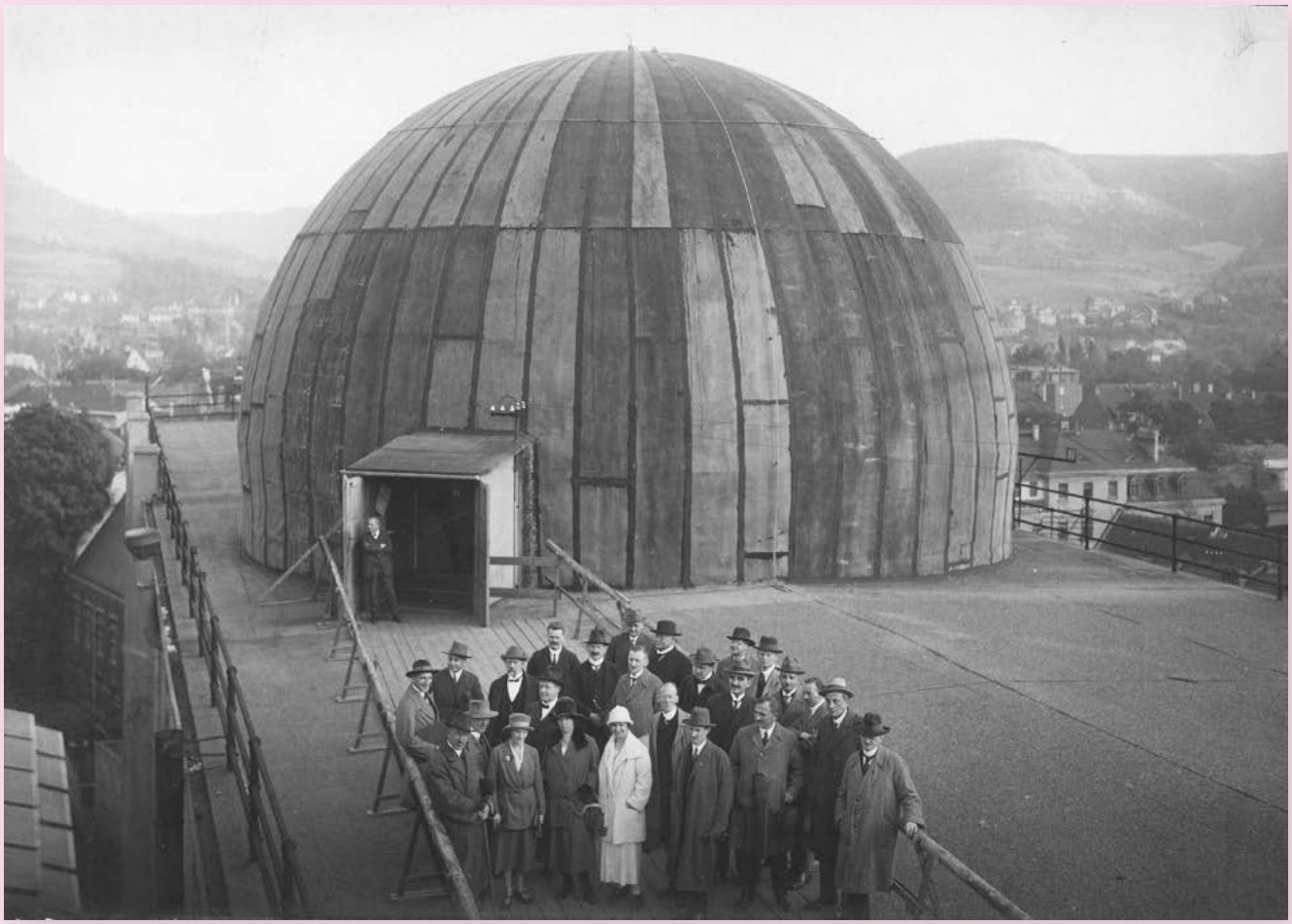

Figure 1: The world's first opto-mechanical projection planetarium on the roof of the Zeiss company building in Jena, 1923. ZEISS Archives; photographer: unknown; © ZEISS Archives.

built around lantern slides. All have their stories to tell. All have contributed to cultural stories about the role of astronomy in society.

Personal histories

Melbourne — and Museums Victoria — holds an excellent heritage of astronomical popularisation. However, the honour for the first planetarium in Australia — and indeed in the Southern Hemisphere — goes to Sydney. From 1950, the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) operated a Spitz planetarium projector, although the first public showing of this planetarium projector was in the Queen Victoria Building under the auspices of QANTAS.[5] However, the installation in MAAS was never entirely suitable and the planetarium was removed around 1980 in preparation for the Powerhouse Museum redevelopment. The H. V. McKay Planetarium, at the Science Museum of Victoria in Swanston Street, Melbourne, opened in 1965 and operated until its closure in 1997,

5 Minister opens Sydney planetarium (1950, 16 December). *Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 5; Exhibition on QANTAS (1950, 14 November). *Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 12.

to be replaced with only a short delay by the current Melbourne Planetarium at the Scienceworks campus of Museums Victoria in Spotswood, Melbourne.

The museum may have changed names and locations, but it has maintained a continuous connection with planetariums for 60 years.[6] One consequence of this is that the museum holds a range of planetarium projectors — possibly the most extensive in the world — including a rare near-complete opto-mechanical projector, the GOTO from the H. V. McKay Planetarium, and the Digistar II, one of the only examples of the first generation of purpose-built digital projectors.[7] At the same time, the museum is also custodian of one of the best international collections of astronomical lantern slides in the world.

If I am sounding invested in this tradition, it is because I am. Growing up in Brisbane, one of my childhood delights was a trip to the Sir Thomas Brisbane Planetarium at Mt Coot-tha; I moved to Melbourne in 1997, just in time to see one of the last public sessions at the H. V. McKay Planetarium; and shortly after getting a job at Museum Victoria I was entrusted with programming the Digistar II. Fascinated by the astronomical lantern slides within the museum's collection, I went on to research the history of astronomical visualisation and have now visited many of the most significant public collections of astronomical lantern slides in the world.

What most struck me on moving from producing early twenty-first century planetarium shows to scholarship on late nineteenth century popular astronomy is how continuous they were in tradition. With just a few edits, talks that the then world-famous popular astronomer Richard Proctor gave in Melbourne in 1880 would be little out of place in the Melbourne Planetarium today.[8] In both presentations, we can hear about the vastness of space and the tininess of the planet Earth in comparison, the remarkable regularities of the motions of the heavens, the sublime beauty of a total solar eclipse and the startling appearances of great comets.

Images of astronomy in lantern slides

Many differences do, of course, exist between the presentations of the nineteenth century and those of today. These are revealed by the images of lantern slides in collections. Some of these reflect changes in style of presentation while others portray changes in historical memory. Amongst my favourite examples are the uses of the 'ship proof' to demonstrate that the shape of the Earth is spheroidal. There are several versions of this slide image, including both animated and non-animated versions, but across many instances of the astronomical slide set they appear at the start of the sequence, intended to be used at the start of a lecture. A very common example of this is the animated slide MM 112717 in Museums Victoria's astronomy collection. The slide is drawn from a set of rackwork slides, first appearing around 1840 but common throughout the nineteenth century. This particular image is

6 The current longest-running planetarium in the Southern Hemisphere is in Montevideo, Uruguay, having opened its doors ten years before the H. V. McKay Planetarium.

7 The Digistar II projector was based around a single beam of light from a Cathode Ray Tube that could be projected to any point of the dome through a fish-eye lens. Successive generations of digital projectors relied upon edge-blending from multiple high-end projectors, with the control coming through standard (but also high-end) computing devices.

8 For more on Proctor's tour of Australia, see Bush, M. (2017). The Proctor-Parkes incident: Politics, protestants and popular astronomy in Australia in 1880. *Historical Records of Australian Science*, 28, pp. 26–36. https://doi.org/10.1071/HR17001

Figure 2: Item MM 62766, Negative showing an audience at the H. V. McKay Planetarium at the Museum of Victoria with the Goto M-1 projector in the centre, around 1970. Museums Victoria; photographer unknown; © Museums Victoria.

Figure 3: Item MM 112717, Lantern slide, 'the Earth's rotundity', showing an animated version of the 'ship proof', around 1850. Museums Victoria; photographer: John Broomfield; © Museums Victoria.

intended to demonstrate what we see when a steamship sails over the horizon towards a port. The first part of the ship to appear in view is the top of the funnel, while the last part to appear is the waterline. Meanwhile, an observer standing at a higher location, like a tall tower, can see further over the horizon than an observer standing at sea level and thus sees the ship earlier. These are all observational facts compatible with a round Earth.

The slide 'Rotundity of the Earth', part of item 64091 in the Bill Douglas Museum at the University of Exeter, has a slightly simpler animated version of this 'ship proof'. This slide comes from a set produced by the brothers William and Samuel Jones, who are among the earliest producers of astronomical lantern slides. The Joneses' slide also contains a static image with a counterfactual version of this argument: if it *were* the case that the Earth were flat then we would see ships shrink strictly in geometric proportion as they approached the horizon, but with all parts visible at all times. Since this is *not* what we see, we can be confident that the Earth is not flat. I can only imagine what my science communication mentors would have said had I tried to introduce a counterfactual argument in the first five minutes of a presentation.

Another use of this technique is shown by the slide MM 112613 in Museums Victoria's collection, which demonstrates that the Earth is smaller in size than the Sun. This slide comes from yet another early astronomical lantern slide set, the 'Popular Lecture on Astronomy'. Here, we are presented with a diagram that illustrates what the consequences would be if the Earth were larger than the Sun. In that case, the shadow cast by the Earth would continue indefinitely in space, always growing, and even the most distant of the planets would be eclipsed when it travelled into this shadow. Again, since this is what we do *not* see, we can be confident that it is *not* the case. As well as the use of a style that is unusual today, this slide is evidence of the

Figure 4: Slide 'Rotundity of the Earth', part of item 64091 in the Bill Douglas Museum showing animated and non-animated versions of the 'ship proof', around 1925. The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, University of Exeter; photographer: unknown; © University of Exeter.

Figure 5: Item MM 112613, Lantern slide, 'Newtonian system' and 'Earth's shadow' including a proof that the Earth is smaller than the Sun, around 1847. Museums Victoria; photographer: Jon Augier; © Museums Victoria.

Figure 6: Item MM 112612, Lantern slide, 'Pythagorean, or Copernican System' and 'Tychonic System' including an illustration of the Tychonic theory of the solar system, around 1847. Museums Victoria; photographer: Jon Augier; © Museums Victoria.

kinds of questions that were pertinent in the mid-nineteenth century. It is unlikely that this question would even be posed in a contemporary planetarium show.

An even more striking example of this changing historical memory, appearing in the same lantern slide set, is the slide MM 112612, which shows the Tychonic theory of the solar system. Almost forgotten today outside the academic field of the history of astronomy, this 'system of the world' was an intermediate position between the old Ptolemaic system — in which the Earth was stationary at the centre of the Universe, with the solar system revolving around it — and the radical heliocentric theory of Copernicus, which placed the Sun at the centre and the Earth as just one of many planets orbiting it. In so doing, the Tychonic system incorporated all the empirical evidence in support of the Copernican system while avoiding the very real theoretical — and theological — issues associated with a moving Earth. For most of the mid-seventeenth century, between the 1620s and the 1680s, before astronomy was reorganised around Newtonian mechanics, the Tychonic system was taken extremely seriously by scholars. Two centuries after this, the Tychonic system was still being recognised, in part because it was able to be portrayed by British popularisers as another stepping stone on the path to the truth revealed by the great Isaac Newton. The rational sciences, like astronomy, have always been bound up with nationalistic traditions. In any case, the memory of the Tychonic system was kept alive with the magic lantern slide. Subsequently, with the demise of that format, it has fallen into obscurity.

One more aspect of the practice of popular astronomy that is revealed by the images of magic lantern slides is the interplay of emotion and reason in communication strategies. It is clear that these elements have long been intertwined. In particular, historians of science have recently shown the importance of performance to science communication, the role of awe in those performances and the role of epistemic emotions in general.[9] Nonetheless, it is striking that astronomy has long been recognised as one of the most visual of the sciences — and one in which even everyday observations of the unaided eye can participate, and yet the character of many of the images above is mathematical and diagrammatic. For many popularisers of science in the nineteenth century, the wonder of astronomy was expressed precisely through its geometrical aspects and their implications of a perfect celestial science — one with particularly philosophical and spiritual dimensions. However, this is not the case for all lantern slide images. The item 1699998 in the National Film and Sound Archive's collection shows a far more naturalistic image of a comet over a landscape. This is a depiction of the great Comet Donati of 1858, and the image bears resemblances to many of the works of art that were produced in the wake of this comet. In contrast to the abstract, universalising laws of other astronomical slides, this image evokes a place-centred, affective response to celestial science. This tension was present in the astronomical performances of the past and remains so today.

9 For example, Morus, I. (2010). Worlds of wonder: Sensation and the Victorian scientific performance. *Isis, 101*(4), pp. 806–16. https://doi.org/10.1086/657479; for awe as epistemic emotion, see Silva Luna, D., & Bering, J. M. (2020). The construction of awe in science communication. *Public Understanding of Science, 30*(1), pp. 2-15. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662520963256

Figure 7: Item 1699998, Lantern slide depicting Donati's comet of 1858, around 1870. Courtesy of The National Film and Sound Archive.

Past technologies of display

The Joneses' slides, the 'Popular Lecture on Astronomy' and the animated rackwork slides all come from the heyday of magic lantern technology in the nineteenth century. This era of a new media technology was driven by a longstanding cultural interest in astronomy as well as a burgeoning industry of slide manufacturing. However, the presence of lantern-slide projection as a public format depending crucially on the intensity of illumination with which these images could be projected. At the turn of the nineteenth century, slides were best lit by oil lamps, powered by whale oil. This allowed projections that could be clearly seen by audiences in a small room during daytime or in a much larger space if completely darkened. Lantern illumination was revolutionised by the application of the limelight, a lighting originally developed for lighthouses. This combination of new illuminants and more easily produced slides allowed the magic lantern to be used consistently for large audiences in public spaces. This combination created a screen culture inherited by cinema at the end of the nineteenth century.

Yet the techniques of the astronomical lantern show were shaped by an even earlier tradition — that of stage astronomy. Before the limelight, there were astronomical lecturers who were able to present large, illuminated displays in front of theatre crowds. From at least the 1780s — a decade before there is evidence

of commercially produced astronomical lantern slides — the Walker family's Eidouranion was impressing crowds in London and elsewhere. As part of the British Enlightenment's use of 'polite astronomy', the Walkers' performances were *'widely hailed for their morally uplifting effect on their audiences'*.[10] The Eidouranion itself would go on to have a remarkably long life, but even more notably its technology would be copied, adapted and shamelessly plagiarised around the world.

This stage astronomy tradition in Britain expanded remarkably in the early nineteenth century, with multiple performers presenting lectures with devices that were similar to the Walkers' Eidouranion but had different names, like the Dioastrodoxon and the Ouranologia. The style and content of these popularisers varied widely, ranging from the devoutly religious to the philosophically secular.[11] These presentations were not confined to the United Kingdom. At around the same time, such devices were seen in North America and in the Australian colonies. The images that this tradition displayed — the tides, the zodiac, building up to the Copernican 'system of the world'[12] — would influence later lantern slides.

Unlike the magic lantern, there are no surviving artefactual traces of the Eidouranion or its imitators. A particular complication is that names like 'Eidouranion' or 'Dioastrodoxon' were brands of performance rather than specific devices; and each such performance included a range of technologies, including static transparency paintings as well as several animated machines.

This confusion has led to differences of opinion about the different constructions of the devices of stage astronomy. Scholars of orreries have suggested that the major apparatus might have been a clockwork orrery mounted vertically, while scholars of the magic lantern have suggested that it would have been a lantern projection. Neither makes sense for the theatrical size of these performances — 6 to 10 metres, or even more, in diameter. A metal gearwork ring of that size would be expensive to forge and too cumbersome to operate, let alone set up and pack down. Lanterns were not capable of projecting at that scale until decades after the Eidouranion was selling out crowds.

In my opinion, the most plausible account of the construction of the Eidouranion and its imitators comes from George William Francis (later curator of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens) in a near-contemporary article from his *Magazine of Science*. He describes a skeleton frame, made from timber, with pulley-operated rotating arms which carry internally illuminated, painted glass globes, each of which could be swapped in and out between scenes. This not only matches the descriptions of the performances of these devices that we have from William Walker himself, but also further descriptions of these 'machines', by the stage astronomer William Goodacre, and by the novelist Maria Edgeworth, who described a lecturer with an Eidouranion who *'should have pleasure in showing Frank the orrery again, and in letting him see the concealed machinery, by which it was moved.'*

10 Golinski, J. (2017). Sublime astronomy: The Eidouranion of Adam Walker and his sons. Huntington Library Quarterly, 80(1), pp. 135–57. https://doi.org/10.1353/hlq.2017.0005

11 Huang, H. (2018). A shared arena: The private astronomy lecturing trade and its institutional counterpart in Britain, 1817–1865. *Notes and Records of the Royal Society, 72*, pp. 319–341. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsnr.2017.0018

12 Walker, W. (1793). *An account of the eidouranion; or, transparent orrery; invented by A. Walker, … as lectured upon by his son W. Walker. With the new Discoveries.*.

Figure 8: Deane Walker exhibiting the Eidouranion at the English Opera House in 1817. S.176–1997. Copyright Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Stage astronomy in Australia

The Eidouranion had an impact in Australia. As in Britain, there are as yet no known surviving devices, but there are several descriptions of this kind of astronomical visualisation in the nineteenth century. None were as grand as the performances on the London stages, but several smaller-scale devices were built. Cabinet maker John Cox built a small transparent orrery for the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts in 1834, and local clerk Phineas Moss built one for the Bothwell Literary Society in Tasmania in 1836.

In Australia — as happened elsewhere — the reputation associated with the names of the famous devices of the stage astronomy tradition was invoked by completely unrelated performers. Noted actor John Meredith used in his advertising the names of both the Eidouranion (in Hobart in 1837) and the Dioastrodoxon (in Sydney in the 1840s). The technology involved in the former of these is uncertain but the latter was almost certainly a magic lantern show, itself novel in the colonies in the time.

Perhaps the most entertaining instance of the stage astronomy tradition in Australia was when a self-styled Professor Muggeridge appeared in South Australia to embark on a series of astronomical lectures *'by means of transparencies'*.[13] The professor, whose legal name was Henry James Masterton but was also known as Professor Norries, would turn out to be a swindler who would use the social cachet of polite astronomy to make his way around the rural districts of the colonies without paying his bills. When he fled his final hotel before capture, he had left behind *'two or three yards of botched calico, coarsely painted over with illustrations of the heavenly bodies'*.[14]

A visual turn

The sophistication of astronomical communication has come a long way since the mid-nineteenth century. Much of the material of earlier practices is lost to us. We will never have Muggeridge's 'botched calico', or the small transparent orreries of Cox or Moss to study. Yet an astonishingly rich legacy of popular astronomy is held within collections around the world. We have astronomical lantern slides from across the nineteenth century and planetarium projectors for most of the twentieth. Multiple sources — texts, images and objects — speak to the lives of these artefacts.

This cultural heritage indicates a more extended tradition. The importance of astronomy within our human story is enduring and the role of visualisation in its telling is almost as long-standing. Although the science of the twenty-first century is new — as it was in the twentieth and nineteenth — it is often interpreted in ways that are reminiscent of the past. Previous practices speak to us; we cannot fully appreciate contemporary science communication in the Melbourne Planetarium without understanding the through-line from the opto-mechanical projectors of the 1960s back to the magic lantern slides of the 1880s and the stage astronomy of the 1820s.

Each of these technologies has built new forms — and played to new audiences. Each has deployed cultural meanings of the skies that have been layered across centuries.

13 For a review of previous discussion on the technology of the Eidouranion see Golinski, J. (2017), footnote 10; for the evidence presented here, including reference to Goodacre and Edgeworth, see Bush, M. (2019). The astronomical lantern slide set and the Eidouranion in Australia. *Early Popular Visual Culture, 17*(1), pp. 9–33. https://doi.org/10.1080/17460654.2019.1620437

14 Lecture on astronomy at Gawler. (1868, July 16). *South Australian Register*, p. 2.

DR LAURA JOCIC

Bound for Australia: Anne Trotter's needlework specimen book, 1840

DOUBLE-BLIND PEER REVIEWED

Among the items Anne Trotter packed in her trunk when she sailed from Ireland to Australia in 1844 was a loose-paged book filled with needlework specimens.[1] The inscription in the front of the book, in neat handwriting, reads, *'Specimens of Needle-Work/Executed/in the Female Free School/Collon/Louth'*. Written on the reverse of the front page in a different hand is the rhyme, *'Anne Trotter is my name/and into my book I wrote my name/the grass is green the [corn is brown?]/hear is my name who [illeg.]/ Dear Collon is my Dwelling Place/but heaven is my Expectation/February/September the 20th 1840/[Mr? Mrs?] Jseph (sic) Trotter'*.[2] Donated to Museums Victoria in 2014 by a descendant, Anne's needlework book, which includes various plain sewing exercises and finely-stitched miniature shirts, provides an insight into the formal schooling offered to working-class girls in nineteenth century Ireland and the skills they brought with them when they emigrated. In particular, the book is significant for the fact that it is a well-provenanced and rare surviving item known to have been brought to Australia in the nineteenth century by a female Irish immigrant.[3] As such, it provides a means for recovering, at least in part, the story of one woman's emigration — and that of her Irish family — to the Port Phillip District in the 1840s.

1 Museums Victoria. (n.d.). HT 36147, *Needlework specimen book — Anne Trotter, Collon, County Louth, Ireland, 1840*, https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/2027802, accessed 10 March 2025. Note: Anne's name is spelled 'Ann' in various records, but 'Anne' is used in this article as it is the spelling that appears in her book and on the ship's passenger list in 1844. Public Record Office Victoria. (n.d.). *Register of assisted immigrants from the United Kingdom (1837-1871). List of immigrants for the barque* "Dale Park", p. 191, https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/E29DD26A-F1B1-11E9-AE98-E74D94661ACA?image=98, accessed 10 March 2025.

2 It is unclear whether this inscription was written by Anne or by her mother or father. Museums Victoria has a scrapbook in its collection with a similar rhyming inscription, which suggests it was a popular saying in the nineteenth century. Museums Victoria. (n.d.). HT 23656, *Scrapbook — Margaret Knopp, Woods Point, 1884*, https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/1479453, accessed 10 March 2025.

3 A sampler made in Ireland by Dorcas McGee in 1850 and brought with her to Australia in 1852 holds similar significance. Lambkin, B. & Meegan, J. (2004). The fabric of memory, identity and diaspora: An Irish needlework sampler in Australia with United States and Canadian connections. *Folk Life, 43*(3), p. 7. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1179/flk.2004.43.1.7

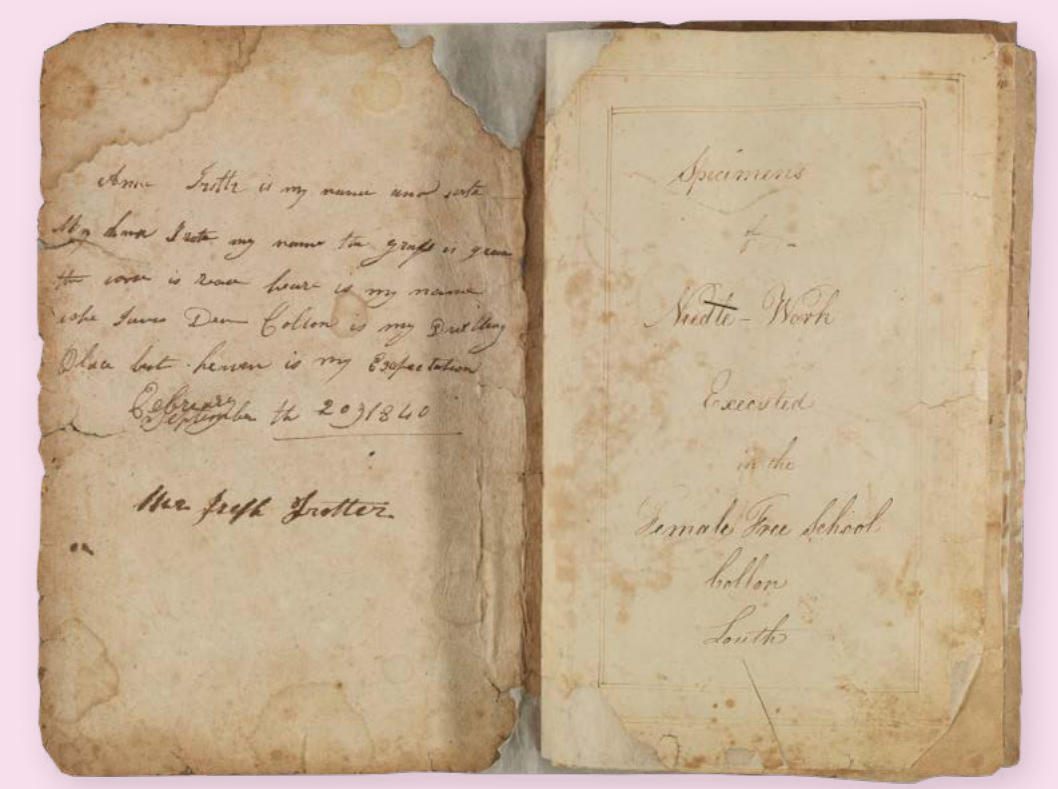

Figure 1: HT36147, Title pages in needlework specimen book — Anne Trotter, Collon, County Louth, Ireland, 1840. Museums Victoria; photographer: Rodney Start; © Museums Victoria.

The fifth surviving child (of eight children) of Joseph and Annie Trotter (née Davison), Anne was born in Collon on 7 June 1820. When her name was written in the book, Anne was 19 years old. We do not know when she attended the Female Free School or whether the date in the inscription relates to when she completed her instruction. Perhaps the latter was written around the time Anne's parents were preparing to leave for Australia ahead of their daughter and two of her siblings. Located in the border region of Ireland, County Louth is the smallest county in Ireland. The Trotters were Protestants and by the early 1840s the family had emigrated to Australia and settled near Geelong. Like many families, the Trotters left Ireland in stages. The entry written next to Anne and her younger sister Eliza's names in the ship's manifest states, '*Left with a brother & his wife to join their Father & brother living at Barrabool Hills Geelong.*'[4] In 1844 Anne and her sister Eliza travelled with their older brother Joseph and his wife Mary on the *Dale Park*, a 402 ton barque, which departed Cork on 30 March and arrived in Port Phillip on 21 July.[5] Shipping records show that an older brother, John, who was listed as a '*Labourer*', arrived in Port Phillip in December 1841.[6] While the emigration records for Anne's parents have not been located, it is evident they had already settled in Australia when Anne arrived in 1844.

4 Public Record Office Victoria. (n.d.). *Register of assisted immigrants from the United Kingdom (1837-1871). List of immigrants for the barque "Dale Park"*, p. 191, https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/E29DD26A-F1B1-11E9-AE98-E74D94661ACA?image=98, accessed 10 March 2025.

5 Port Phillip. Arrivals — July 21. (1844, August 3). *Shipping Gazette and Sydney General Trade List*, p. 138.

6 Public Record Office Victoria. (n.d.). *Register of assisted immigrants from the United Kingdom (1837-1871). List of immigrants per the ship* Gilmore, p. 240, https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/E289FC3D-F1B1-11E9-AE98-4F5884FEEC7B?image=250, accessed 10 March 2025.

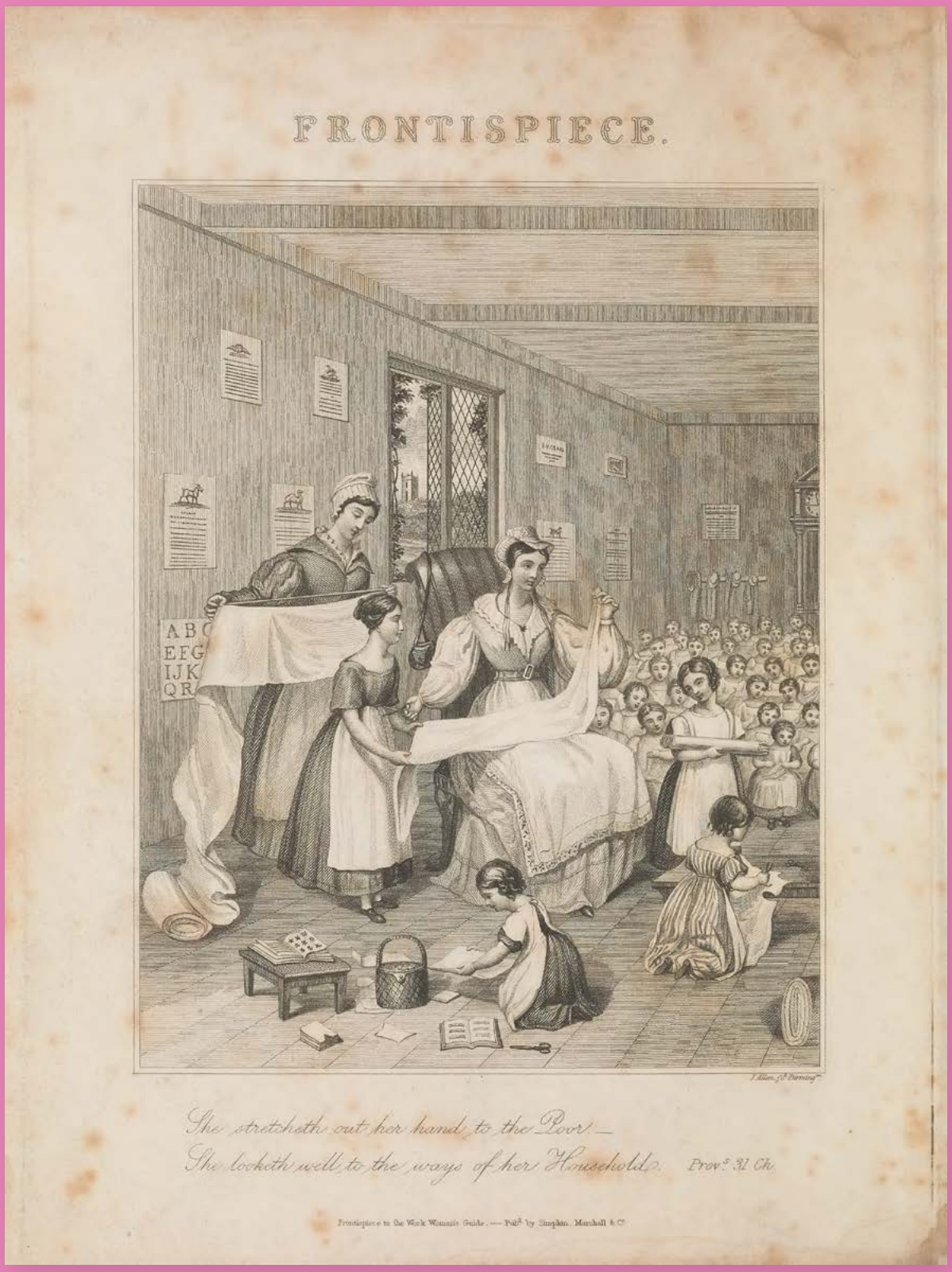

Figure 2: James Allen, Frontispiece to *The workwoman's guide*, 1838, engraving. Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Library, TT705 .H16 1838; © Smithsonian Libraries.

Bound for Port Phillip, the *Dale Park* was reported as carrying five passengers and 221 emigrants. The former, who would have paid for their passage, were named in the newspaper as Mr., Mrs. and two Misses Barrow, and Mr. Shone.[7] The latter, who were emigrating under the British government's assisted migration scheme, were listed generically as comprising '*82 married couples, 77 children, 32 single females, and 30 single males*'.[8] Although the British government actively encouraged the migration of suitable single women to Australia to redress the gender imbalance, it is evident that women who were listed as single in the ship manifests did not necessarily come alone, as is the case with Anne. She emigrated with members of her family in a pattern of chain migration, where families arrived in the colonies over a number of years.[9] Anne and Eliza were travelling with their brother and sister-in-law, but the sisters, aged 23 and 17 respectively, were categorised in the ship's manifest as '*Single women*' and would have been allocated a berth in the single women's quarters, separate from the married couples and single men.[10]

Assisted migration

Beginning in New South Wales in 1831, formal processes of assisted and unassisted migration of free settlers coincided with the ongoing transportation of convicts to the colonies until the latter finally ceased in 1868. With overcrowded cities in Britain, the Australian colonies sought suitable immigrants who would provide the much-needed labour for an evolving colonial settler society. Assisted migration was seen as the key and was funded through the sale of Crown land in Australia.[11] Prior to 1831, the arrival of free settlers had increased slowly, with the long and costly voyage acting as a deterrent. As of 1830, a total of only 15,700 free migrants had arrived in Australia since first settlement.[12] However, between 1831 and 1850, when assisted migration schemes were well underway, 170,000 emigrants from Great Britain arrived in the Australian colonies — two-thirds of whom were assisted[13] — while from 1831 to 1900 approximately half of all immigrants received some form of government assistance for the voyage to Australia.[14] In providing free passage for suitable emigrants, the British government stated that it wished to ensure that '*a most valuable class of moral and industrious persons might be obtained*'.[15] In 1844, Anne and Eliza and their brother Joseph and his wife were deemed to be such people.[16] The bounty recorded beside each of

7 Port Phillip. Arrivals — July 21. (1844, August 3), p. 138.

8 Port Phillip. Arrivals — July 21. (1844, August 3), p. 138.

9 Oxley, D. (1996). *Convict maids: The forced migration of women to Australia*. Cambridge University Press, p. 173.

10 Charlwood, D. (1981). *The long farewell*: The perilous voyages of settlers under sail in the great migrations to Australia. Allen Lane, pp. 115–23.

11 Inglis, K. (1993). *Australian colonists*. Melbourne University Press, p. 21.

12 Seltzer, A. (2015). Labour, skills and migration. In S. Ville & G. Withers (Eds.), *The Cambridge economic history of Australia*. Cambridge University Press, p.181. https://doi.org/10.1017/CHO9781107445222.013

13 Inglis, K. (1993), p. 21.

14 Seltzer, A. (2015). In S. Ville & G. Withers (Eds.), p. 180. https://doi.org/10.1017/CHO9781107445222.013

15 New South Wales final report of the committee of the Legislative Council on emigration, and minutes of evidence. 18 May 1835, quoted in Oxley, D. (1996). *Convict maids: The forced migration of women to Australia*. Cambridge University Press, p. 176.

16 The report produced by authorities on the arrival of the Dale Park states of the bounty immigrants that '*...they seem like the description of people likely to become useful to the Colony*.' Public Record Office Victoria. (n.d.). Register of assisted immigrants from the United Kingdom (1837-1871). *List of immigrants for the barque* "Dale Park", p. 194, https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/E29DD26A-F1B1-11E9-AE98-E74D94661ACA?image=98, accessed 10 March 2025.

their names was £18 14s.[17] The various assisted migration schemes either offered free passage for eligible persons or lent the passage money, which was to be repaid by the emigrant when they were settled in the colony.[18]

Life below deck on the emigrant ships was rudimentary. Assisted migrants travelled in steerage class, which was a basic, communal form of accommodation located on the lower decks. Shipboard diaries attest to the difficult and cramped conditions experienced aboard the migrant ships.[19] As a barque, the *Dale Park* was typical of the migrant ships enlisted for the route to Australia. She took 113 days, or just over 16 weeks, to reach Port Phillip from Ireland. Until the faster Great Circle route was officially adopted by the Admiralty in Britain in 1854, ships could typically take 120 days — or longer, if they experienced difficulties — to reach their destination.[20] During the voyage very few items could be kept in the passenger quarters, with the remainder being stowed in the ship's hold. Clothing and possessions were constantly at risk of being ruined from dampness and the infiltration of sea water. It is therefore remarkable that Anne's needlework book survived the voyage. Such a book was more than just a sentimental item; it demonstrated Anne's abilities with a needle and would have been an important item shown to a prospective employer, particularly when seeking a position in a household as a domestic servant.

Irish migration to Australia pre-famine

The Trotter family emigrated from Ireland prior to the Great Famine, when over one million Irish starved to death between 1845 and 1849 from the successive failure of the potato crops due to blight.[21] The Trotters' choice to come to Australia rather than sail for America was unusual, as most Irish chose to make the shorter voyage across the Atlantic.[22] Perhaps the Trotters, along with many nineteenth century immigrants to the Australian colonies, had a sense that Australia could provide them with bright opportunities that were lacking in their homeland. However, such a long and arduous journey was not undertaken by emigrants without much deliberation, and their letters and journals bear witness to conflicting feelings of separation, loss and hopes for the future.[23]

The Trotter family was fortunate, as they successfully emigrated as a group over a number of years, re-establishing the core of their family unit in Australia. Very few Irish emigrants to Australia came from the Trotters' home county of Louth. In contrast, an over-representation of assisted Irish emigrants came from the rural counties of Clare and Tipperary.[24] As the Irish historian David Fitzpatrick has shown,

17 Public Record Office Victoria. (n.d.). *Register of assisted immigrants from the United Kingdom (1837–1871). List of immigrants for the Barque* "Dale Park", pp. 190–1, https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/E29DD26A-F1B1-11E9-AE98-E74D94661ACA?image=98, accessed 10 March 2025.

18 Oxley, D. (1996), p. 172. In the case of the *Dale Park*, the bounty was paid by the government. See Public Record Office Victoria. (n.d.). *Register of assisted immigrants from the United Kingdom (1837-1871). List of immigrants for the Barque* "Dale Park", pp. 195–6, https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/E29DD26A-F1B1-11E9-AE98-E74D94661ACA?image=98, accessed 10 March 2025.

19 See for example the diaries and excerpts from letters that are included in Charlwood, D. (1981). *The long farewell : The perilous voyages of settlers under sail in the great migrations to Australia*. Allen Lane.

20 Charlwood, D. (1981), p. 23.

21 Mokyr, J. (2025). Great famine. *Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Famine-Irish-history, accessed 10 March 2025.

22 O'Farrell, P. (1987). *The Irish in Australia*. New South Wales University Press, p. 62.

23 O'Farrell, P. (1987), p. 65.

24 Fitzpatrick, D. (1994). *Oceans of consolation: Personal accounts of Irish migration to Australia*. Cork University Press, p. 15.

the prevalence of chain migration meant that the distribution of county origins in Australia changed little between the late 1840s and the end of the nineteenth century, as immigrants encouraged friends, family and neighbours from their home counties to follow.[25] About four-fifths of Irish emigrants to Australia were Catholic and it was only pre-famine bounty immigration that saw a large intake of Irish Protestants.[26] The Trotters fitted into this category. The ship's manifest listed their religion as '*Protestant*' and the sisters' profession or '*Calling*', was '*House maid*'.[27] Joseph, Mary and Anne were noted as being able to read and write, and Eliza as being able to read.[28] This points to a level of education that the family likely received from the national schools set up in Ireland in the nineteenth century. Indeed, we know from the inscription in Anne's book that she completed her work at one of these free schools. The existence of Anne's book, with its reference to classes that she has completed, leads us to ask what kind of school this was, and what curriculum Anne was working to.

Education for the poor: Women and needlework instruction

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the creation of public education programs in Britain sought to address endemic poverty, which had arisen out of the effects of the Industrial Revolution and rapid urban growth.[29] At this time, charity and parish schools scattered around the country provided a non-standardised system of education for the poor.[30] Charity schools were also established in colonial settlements. One such example was the Female School of Industry in Sydney, founded in 1826 by Eliza Darling, the Governor's wife. Its aim was to educate working-class girls, with an emphasis on needlework and religious instruction. An announcement for the school's establishment was made in the *Sydney Gazette*, outlining the number of students (ten girls aged 7 to 10 and another ten aged 10 to 14) and the curriculum: '*The Girls to be instructed, in every Branch of Household Work, Plain Needle Work, Knitting, Spinning, Reading, Writing, and the four first Rules of Arithmetic.*'[31] The inclusion of needlework reflects the centrality of sewing in women's lives and the expectation that the skills taught at school would equip them for a life focused on the home, whether as wives and mothers or as domestic servants.[32]

In Britain, a national system of free general education was seen as the answer to providing a compulsory basic education that would ensure a stable moral and political economy.[33] Free public education was linked to the notion of civil management, stimulating the creation of the free school model.[34] This model was drawn from a

25 Fitzpatrick, D. (1994), p. 14.

26 Fitzpatrick, D. (1994), p. 14.

27 Public Record Office Victoria. (n.d.). *Register of assisted immigrants from the United Kingdom (1837-1871). List of immigrants for the barque* "Dale Park", p. 191, https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/E29DD26A-F1B1-11E9-AE98-E74D94661ACA?image=98, accessed 10 March 2025. The emigrants on the Dale Park came from the English midlands and northern counties of Ireland, and the majority are listed as being Protestant.

28 Public Record Office Victoria. (n.d.). Register of assisted immigrants from the United Kingdom (1837-1871). *List of immigrants for the barque* "Dale Park", pp. 190–1, https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/E29DD26A-F1B1-11E9-AE98-E74D94661ACA?image=98, accessed 10 March 2025.

29 Tonks, P. (2016). Scottish political economy, education and the management of poverty in industrializing Britain: Patrick Colquhoun and the Westminster free school model. *History, 101*(347), p. 495. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12245

30 Tonks, P. (2016), p. 498. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12245

31 Advertisement. (1826, March 18). *Sydney Gazette*, p. 1.

32 Parker, R. (1996). *The subversive stitch: Embroidery and the making of the feminine*. The Women's Press, p. 188.

33 Tonks, P. (2016), p. 498. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12245

34 Tonks, P. (2016), p. 495. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12245

colonial educational system developed and implemented under the patronage of the East India Company in Madras.[35] It was based on a monitorial system of mutual instruction developed by the Reverend Andrew Bell, which was first implemented in the late eighteenth century in the Male Asylum in Madras.[36] This mode of teaching came to be known as the 'Madras System'. In this system, competent older students were involved in teaching and facilitating classes for younger students, thereby saving on teachers' salaries.[37] To earn an income, these schools also took in work, which was handed out to the competent students.[38] The monitorial system was introduced into Ireland by the education reformer Joseph Lancaster and was taken up by the Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in Ireland (also known as the Kildare Place Society) when it opened its model school in Dublin in 1815.[39] In 1831 Ireland established a government system of free national elementary education, and the monitorial system of needlework instruction was employed in the curriculum overseen by the Board of National Education.[40] To begin with, the national schools followed the Kildare Place Society's monitorial system of instruction, including that of needlework.[41] The board introduced a standardised curriculum and published a series of textbooks, including one on needlework.[42] *Simple Directions in Needle-work and Cutting out; Intended for the use in the National Female Schools of Ireland*, published in 1835, makes clear the process of instruction and the demographic of the students of the free schools. The opening pages state:

> *It will be found a useful practice to have the directions for each class read out for the children by its Monitress on one or two days of the week, and occasionally to question the pupils on substance. Classification, and instruction by Monitors, are referred to as points established in all well-regulated schools for the instruction of the poor.*[43]

The monitorial system allowed for large numbers of students to be taught in classes by selected students, under the overall guidance of a teacher. All the students were located in one large classroom with multiple classes running at the same time. At the Female School of Industry in Sydney, which followed the Madras System, there were up to four classes at a time running in the large classroom, with between eight and

35 Tonks, P. (2016), pp. 509–10. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12245

36 Windschuttle, E. (1980). Discipline, domestic training and social control: The Female School of Industry, Sydney 1826–1847. *Labour History, 39*, p. 6. https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/doi/10.3828/27508433

37 Windschuttle, E. (1980), p. 6. https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/doi/10.3828/27508433

38 Windschuttle, E. (1980), p. 12. https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/doi/10.3828/27508433. See also The Board of National Education. (1835). *Simple directions in needle-work and cutting out; Intended for the use of the national female schools of Ireland*. Hibernia Press, p. 8.

39 McDermid, J. (2012). *The schooling of girls in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1900*. Routledge, p.123. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203645765; Tarrant, N. (2014). *'Remember now thy creator': Scottish girls' samplers, 1700–1872*. Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, p. 50. https://doi.org/10.9750/9781908332271

40 Walsh, T. (2016). The national system of education, 1831–2000. In B. Walsh (Ed.), *Essays in the history of Irish education*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 8–9. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51482-0_2

41 This curriculum was adapted from the Kildare Place Society's needlework publication, *A concise account of the mode of instructing in needle-work, as practised in the female model school, Kildare Place, Dublin, 1833*. Tarrant, N. (2014). *'Remember now thy creator': Scottish girls' samplers, 1700–1872*. Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, p. 51. https://doi.org/10.9750/9781908332271

42 Coolahan, J. (1983). The daring first decade of the Board of National Education, 1831–1841. *Irish Journal of Education, 7*(1), p. 47. https://www.erc.ie/documents/vol17chp2.pdf

43 The Board of National Education. (1835), pp. 5–6.

ten pupils per class. Each class had an assigned monitor.[44] The 1835 Board of National Education needlework publication goes on to state:

> *The usual arrangement for a General Monitress, and for subordinate ones, is therefore recommended. The former should cut out and adjust the work, and supply to the latter, under the direction of the Teacher, the various matters necessary for the use of the classes…The work, and other requisites for the use of each class, including a furnished needle-book, thimbles, scissors, and a good model of the work, should be placed in small baskets, or work-bags, so that the Monitresses may not lose time in applying for materials, but at once actively proceed to supply the children and put them to business.*[45]

Monitresses were given '*small rewards of either clothes or money*' for their work.[46] Particular attention was paid to the selection of monitresses with regards to their '*morals, tempers, habits, abilities, and general good conduct*', as they were to set an example to their students in all these areas. The position was regarded as '*highly honorable*' and the '*best children*' were selected as '*the highest reward to which they can aspire while at school*'.[47] While monitresses were responsible for the general teaching of the classes, the teacher inspected particular classes on certain days and was responsible for deciding when a pupil could transfer to a higher class.[48]

The national female schools of Ireland, where Anne studied, were part of a system of free public education that championed literacy and numeracy. In the early decades of its implementation, the curriculum required all students to undertake subjects in reading, arithmetic, writing, writing from dictation, grammar and geography, with girls being required to study the additional subject of needlework.[49] For working-class girls, the ability to execute a range of plain sewing skills was a door to future employment, a point which was noted in the 1835 needlework publication:

> *The practical knowledge of needlework, and its appendages of cutting out, altering, repairing, &c, &c., must always be regarded as highly useful to females generally, and particularly so to those of the poorer classes, whether applied to domestic purposes, or as a mode of procuring a decent subsistence.*[50]

While the acquisition of sewing skills was considered vital for young women who sought employment as domestic servants, or as preparation for the good management of their households as wives, the discipline of sewing was also considered to have a moral benefit for girls, inculcating the female virtues of modesty, obedience and self-discipline.[51] Being industrious with the needle discouraged idleness, and needlework

44 Windschuttle, E. (1980), p. 7.
45 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 6.
46 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 9.
47 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 9.
48 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 8.
49 Walsh, T. (2016). In B. Walsh (Ed.), p. 30. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51482-0_2
50 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 5.
51 Richmond, V. (2013). *Clothing the poor in nineteenth-century England.* Cambridge University Press, p. 102.

lessons were considered a training in the formation of good character based on diligence, restraint, self-control and duty.[52]

Plain sewing in the home

Plain sewing was an unavoidable part of domestic life in the nineteenth century. Women of all classes were faced with the repetitive and time-consuming tasks of mending, altering and making basic clothing in the home, as well as cutting out and hemming table linen, sheets, towels, curtains and various soft furnishings. Nineteenth century Australian letters and journals reveal how women were regularly at their 'work', as they described their sewing, and at times were overpowered by the constant requirements of household sewing. For those who could afford it, a needlewoman was employed to undertake such work; however, it was usually the women of the family — the mothers, wives and daughters — who dealt with these plain sewing tasks.[53]

Georgiana McCrae, who emigrated to Melbourne in 1841, was regularly at her needle, making, altering and mending clothes for her family. In September 1842 Georgiana recorded that she had '*cut out five pairs of trousers, and nearly completed one pair*' and two years later she noted she had cut up one of her old dresses to make a '*striped blue tabbinet frock*' for her daughter.[54] In the late 1850s and early 1860s, Blanche Mitchell, who was in her late teens, wrote regularly of being at her '*work*'. In January 1861 Blanche and her mother were '*busy making and putting curtains to the dairy*' and a few days later she records that she was '*working all the morning, made two pink calico table curtains, ditto valences and toilet covers*.'[55]

In December 1842, a year and a half after their arrival in Melbourne, Sarah Bunbury described how she was busy with her needle making what she had '*brought out last as long as possible*' by '*altering and contriving*', as she found the local cost of clothing very high.[56] Again, in November 1843 Sarah Bunbury wrote of repairing and altering her and her husband's clothing[57] and in October 1845 she described how she was '*overpowered with needlework, making & mending summer things for all of us…*'[58] These genteel women's descriptions of the sewing tasks they were regularly tending to give us an insight into the scope and importance of needlework undertaken in colonial households by women of all classes in the mid-nineteenth century. As can be seen, when immigrants such as Anne Trotter and her family were arriving in Australia, such skills were of vital importance to adapting to life in their new home.

52 Cramer, L. (2020). *Needlework and women's identity in colonial Australia*. Bloomsbury, p. 68.

53 Cramer, L. (2020), pp. 69–70.

54 Fletcher, M. (1984). *Costume in Australia 1788–1901*. Oxford University Press, p. 81. Tabbinet is a fabric resembling poplin that is made of silk and wool and usually given a watered finish.

55 Mitchell, B. (1980). *Blanche: An Australian diary*. John Ferguson, pp. 265, 272.

56 Bunbury, S. (1842, December 10). [Letter to Lady Bunbury]. State Library of Victoria. (Bunbury Family Papers, MS 13530, Series 6, Letter 13), Melbourne, VIC, Australia.

57 Bunbury, S. (1843, November 17). [Letter to Robert Clement Sconce]. State Library of Victoria. (Bunbury Family Papers, MS 13530, Series 6, Letter 104), Melbourne, VIC, Australia.

58 Bunbury, S. (1845, October 10). [Letter to Robert Clement Sconce]. State Library of Victoria. (Bunbury Family Papers, MS 13530, Series 6, Letter 117), Melbourne, VIC, Australia.

Figure 3: HT36147, Specimens No. 7 & 20, Shirt and Patching, in Needlework Specimen Book — Anne Trotter, Collon, County Louth, Ireland, 1840. Museums Victoria; photographer: Rodney Start. © Museums Victoria.

Anne's book

Anne Trotter's needlework specimen book is a rare surviving well-provenanced object known to have been brought to Australia by an Irish immigrant. It was kept in the family for 174 years before being donated to Museums Victoria by Anne's great-great-great-granddaughter Margaret Bagnall in 2014.[59] One can imagine generations of Anne's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren being fascinated by the old book with the 'dolls' clothes' pinned into it. However, these were not dolls' clothes, but miniature, fifth-scale garments made in the course of needlework instruction. A closer look reveals that each sample was a particular exercise that taught a specific sewing skill, such as seaming, patching, darning, tucking and buttonholes. The book, with its specimens and hand-written headings referring to numbered class exercises, indicates that Anne was working to a specified curriculum that commenced with the most basic exercises of hemming and progressed through to the more complex, including the making of miniature shirts. Research undertaken into the national female schools of Ireland uncovered the standardised curriculum, which Anne was working to when she affixed the specimens she had completed in her book. A vital reference is a first edition of the Board of National Education's *Simple Directions in Needle-work and*

59 Museums Victoria. (n.d.). HT 36147, *Needlework specimen book — Anne Trotter, Collon, County Louth, Ireland, 1840*, https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/2027802, accessed 10 March 2025.

Cutting Out; Intended for the National Free Schools of Ireland, published in 1835, which is in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.[60] This book provides instructions for the teaching of the curriculum and includes examples of '*Specimens of work Executed by the Pupils of the National Model Female School*' which are similar to Anne's. It is therefore possible to trace what Anne was being taught and to obtain an insight into the rationale behind the curriculum that was equipping young women for domestic and working life. Later editions of the book show that the curriculum varied little over a 30-year span.[61] One thing to bear in mind is that in 1840, when Anne was completing these exercises, it was a good 10 years before a commercial model of the sewing machine was first made available by Isaac Singer in 1851.[62] All the specimens in Anne's book have been stitched by hand. This was the nature of women's plain sewing until well into the second half of the nineteenth century, when the sewing machine became more affordable.

The exercises

Pairing the specimens in Anne's book with those in the curriculum was not entirely straightforward, as not all of Anne's numbered classes or specimens matched exactly with those in the published books. However, Anne's progress and the skills she was taught closely corresponded with the formal needlework curriculum as set out by the Board of National Education. The curriculum progressed students through four divisions, each consisting of four classes, starting with simple hemming and finishing with various items of fancy work such as pelerines, tippets, braid chains and reticules.[63] Anne completed specimens from the first to eleventh class, the latter being the knitted items that were the penultimate class of the third division. It appears Anne did not complete the twelfth class, which taught three different types of straw plaiting suitable for hats.

The first division comprised classes covering the skills of hemming, sewing and stitching of seams. Beginning with a simple stitching exercise, the first class entailed the hemming of two small pieces of cotton with running stitches. The specimen labelled '*No. 1*' in Anne's book is a rectangular piece of yellow cotton and '*No. 2*' is a square of printed brown cotton, with the edges of both specimens finished in the same manner. According to the instructions, the pupils were to first try hemming in paper before progressing to the first sample in fabric.[64] The second class, which in the curriculum was titled '*Sewing*', is a development on the first exercise. Anne's third specimen is made up of four small squares of cotton, two white and two printed with a red geometric pattern, which have been carefully sewn together to form a larger window-pane square.

60 Victoria and Albert Museum. (n.d.). T2 to C-1942. *Instruction book, simple directions in needlework and cutting out; intended for the use of the national female schools of Ireland,* 1835, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O108338/simple-directions-in-needlework-and-instruction-book-national-model-female/, accessed 10 March 2025.

61 See for example: Powerhouse Museum. (n.d.). P3561 Text book, *Simple directions in needlework and cutting out, intended for the use of the national female schools of Ireland*, (1858), https://collection.powerhouse.com.au/object/329382, accessed 10 March 2025; The Commissioners of National Education. (1850). *Simple directions in needle-work and cutting out, intended for the use of the national female schools of Ireland*. G. & J. Grierson. State Library of Victoria H 646.2 IR2S (1850); The Commissioners of National Education. (1862). *Simple directions in needle-work and cutting out, intended for the use of the national female schools of Ireland*. Alexander Thom. State Library of Victoria H 646.2 IR2S (1862).

62 Davies, R. B. (1969). 'Peacefully working to conquer the world': The Singer Manufacturing Company in foreign markets, 1854–1889. *Business History Review, 43*(3), p. 301. https://doi.org/10.2307/3112385

63 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 2.

64 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 12.

Figure 4: HT36147, Specimens No. 1 & 2, Hemming, in Needlework Specimen Book — Anne Trotter, Collon, County Louth, Ireland, 1840. Museums Victoria ; photographer: Rodney Start. © Museums Victoria.

Figure 5: HT36147, Specimens No. 3, 4, 5 & 6, Sewing, Double Seam, Stitching and Buttonholes, in Needlework Specimen Book — Anne Trotter, Collon, County Louth, Ireland, 1840. Museums Victoria; photographer: Rodney Start. © Museums Victoria.

Below this specimen is one labelled '*No. 4 Third Class*'. At this stage students were taught '*Seaming*'. The curriculum states that this is to be a double seam or run-and-fell.[65] Specimens No. 4 and No. 5, executed in the 1835 book in white cotton, are examples of both these types of seaming.[66] However, Anne's specimen No. 4 corresponds with the double seaming of No. 5 in the curriculum. Her example is stitched in a cotton fabric printed with a wide striped geometric design and is a lesson in seaming, hemming and matching stripes on the bias. The fourth class involved '*Stitching*', which taught backstitch and half backstitch. Anne's sample labelled '*No. 5*' (which corresponds to No. 6 in the curriculum) comprises five neatly sewn horizontal rows executed in coloured thread on a white cotton ground. The contrasting stitching makes the exercise even more exacting, as any mistakes or deviations can be easily detected.

Having completed these first four exercises in basic hand-sewing, the students moved on to the second division, which comprised classes five to eight. These taught '*Overcasting – Button-holes, Buttons*', '*Gathering and Fastening-in Gathers*', '*Tucking and Trimming*' and '*Marking*'. At this level the students were expected to have gained proficiency in basic sewing and were, as such, described as '*Scholars perfect in the works of the preceding Classes, and capable of practising the nicer kinds of Plain-work.*'[67] Anne's specimen for the fifth class, labelled '*No. 6*', has five carefully stitched buttonholes executed in contrasting thread on a white cotton ground and surrounded by a border stitched in pale pink thread and dotted with rows of small running stitches. It appears that Anne did not complete the second specimen (No. 8) in the curriculum for the fifth class, which involved the making of cloth buttons, but she did complete the '*Gathering and Fastening-in Gathers*'. Although not labelled in her book, this was the ninth specimen to be completed in the curriculum.[68] This is a heavily gathered piece of white cotton that has been seamed into wide bands at either end. The exercise prepares students for the task of gathering shirtsleeves into cuffs. In this specimen Anne has incorporated a repeat of the stitching exercise in the fourth class, with five rows of contrasting stitches that create decorative stripes.

In the sixth class Anne progressed to stitching a complete shirt (labelled '*No. 7*') in miniature, executing a collar, cuffs, buttonholes and a front placket. The making of a shirt is set down in the curriculum for the tenth class. On the lower front of Anne's specimen shirt she has cross-stitched her name in fine blue thread. This task was part of the '*Marking*' exercise taught in the eighth class. Shirts, underwear and household linen were marked with initials or a name so they could be identified at the end of the laundering process and correctly sorted and returned.[69] This was particularly important if the laundering was sent out to a washerwoman. The task of marking was one that a domestic servant would have fulfilled in a household as part of her duties and therefore one of the many sewing lessons that were directly related to the employment of girls and young women.

65 The Commissioners of National Education. (1858). *Simple directions in needle-work and cutting out, intended for the use of the national female schools of Ireland*, Alex. Thom & Sons, p. 11.

66 Victoria and Albert Museum. (n.d.), https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O108338/simple-directions-in-needlework-and-instruction-book-national-model-female/, accessed 10 March 2025.

67 The Commissioners of National Education. (1858), p. 9.

68 The Commissioners of National Education. (1858), p. 13.

69 Burman, B., & Fennetaux, A. (2019). *The pocket: A hidden history of women's lives*. Yale University Press, p. 96.

Figure 6: HT36147, Ninth Class, Darning, First and Second specimens, in Needlework Specimen Book – Anne Trotter, Collon, County Louth, Ireland, 1840. Museums Victoria.

Figure 7: HT36147, Stocking and Infant's boot in Needlework Specimen Book – Anne Trotter, Collon, County Louth, Ireland, 1840. Museums Victoria.

Figure 8: HT36147, Dress in Needlework Specimen Book – Anne Trotter, Collon, County Louth, Ireland, 1840. Museums Victoria.

The seventh class taught '*Tucking and Trimming*' and Anne has worked a muslin square with three rows of small, even tucks and then applied a frill around all the edges in a fine whipstitch. This specimen is labelled '*No. 8*' and corresponds to No. 10 in the curriculum. In the eighth class Anne's specimen again diverges from the set curriculum, which was to be '*Marking*'. In surviving published books, specimen No. 11 is a small sampler with a cross-stitched alphabet. As we have seen, however, Anne had incorporated this exercise into her shirt, saving the need for a piece of open-weave linen on which to stitch the sampler.[70] Anne's eighth class consists of two meticulously sewn fifth-scale white cotton shirts that incorporate the previous exercises of tucking, gathering and fastening-in of gathers. While only one shirt specimen (No. 26) was described in the curriculum, Anne executed a total of three different types of shirt specimens. These would have provided models for the needlework that women were expected to undertake in the home, sewing shirts for their husbands, brothers and sons.

The third division comprised classes nine to twelve and covered '*Mending*', '*Making*', '*Knitting*' and '*Platting*'. Anne's four darning specimens from the ninth class are executed on carefully hemmed squares of natural-coloured open-weave linen in a combination of dark brown and pink thread. Although she has not labelled them, the first specimen is, in accordance with the curriculum, an example of '*Twill Darn*', the second is '*Wave Darn*', the third is '*Double Diamond Darn*' and the fourth is '*Single Diamond Darn*'.[71] These specimens relate to numbers 14, 15, 18 and 16 respectively in the curriculum. Anne's seventh specimen of the ninth class (labelled '*No. 16*') is a six-pointed star made from alternating red and blue flannel. This appears to be a piecing exercise called '*Fine-drawing Cloth*' (specimen No. 22 in the curriculum), which deals with the joining of thick pieces of fabric that are abutted to one another. This method avoids the bulk created from traditional modes of seaming that incorporate a seam allowance. However, the pieces in Anne's specimen are not abutted, but neatly seamed in a traditional way. Such an exercise was intended to train the students in the mending of men's suiting.[72] The distinctive red and white striped cotton square labelled '*No. 20*', which is placed on a loose page next to specimen No. 7, is the '*Patching*' exercise. Here Anne has pieced in a central square patch, carefully matching the stripes so that the insert is barely detectable. This specimen corresponds with the curriculum's numbered specimens and in the 1835 book this is made from a finely checked blue and white cotton.[73] Anne did not complete specimen No. 21 in the ninth class, which was an exercise in '*Grafting*'. In the 1835 book this is another patching exercise similar to the previous, but executed on a piece of finely knitted white fabric that required the student to graft in a square patch by picking up the knitted loops with their thread.[74]

70 See for example, Victoria and Albert Museum. (n.d.), https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O108338/simple-directions-in-needlework-and-instruction-book-national-model-female/, accessed 10 March 2025.

71 The Commissioners of National Education. (1858), pp. 16–18.

72 For a similar item, see Powerhouse Museum. (n.d.). 92/80. *Needlework sampler made by Mary Murphy*, 1837-1860, https://collection.powerhouse.com.au/object/128168, accessed 10 March 2025.

73 Victoria and Albert Museum. (n.d.), https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O108338/simple-directions-in-needlework-and-instruction-book-national-model-female/, accessed 10 March 2025.

74 Victoria and Albert Museum. (n.d.), https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O108338/simple-directions-in-needlework-and-instruction-book-national-model-female/, accessed 10 March 2025.

The tenth class taught '*Making*' and comprised exercises in '*Herringbone stitch on Flannel and Muslin*' and a '*Heart Piece*', which is a set-in breast gusset for a shirt. Anne's specimens for these exercises are labelled 17 to 19 (numbers 23 to 25 in the curriculum) and again she has been required to execute them in contrasting coloured thread. Anne's four unlabelled items of knitting are specimens from the eleventh class. One is a miniature stocking, which is shaped to the contours of the foot and leg, another is a blue infant's boot and the third is a cap described in the curriculum as '*Scotch Knitting*'.[75] The fourth is a strip of multicoloured diagonally striped scarf length, fringed at either end, which would fit the description of '*Fancy Knitting*'.[76]

The final specimen in Anne's book is a dress, or underdress, made in white cotton with a square neckline and short puffed sleeves. Anne has not identified a class or specimen number, and while it bears no direct correlation with the specimens in the curriculum, it may be one of the items she chose to make up from the '*Cutting Out*' section in the later part of the book (which included '*Plain Chemises*', '*Frocks and Pelerines*' and '*Boys' Dresses*').[77] Having learnt how to make shirts, this exercise provides the template for a dress, underdress or child's dress, which could easily be made in the home. The bodice of the dress has been cut on the bias, which is a standard feature of dresses from the early decades of the nineteenth century, as is the raised waist with the seamline under the bust. The hem of the dress has a vandyke or saw tooth feature created by bagging out the points — an exacting thing to accomplish neatly, especially on such a small scale.

It appears Anne did not undertake the more advanced needlework of the fourth division, as these specimens are absent from her book. These classes included '*Muslin-work*', '*Lace-work*', '*Worsted-work*' and '*Thread-work*', with instruction on '*Netted Pelerines*', '*Boa Tippets*' and '*Reticules*' being among the fancy items to be made.[78] These classes may not have been offered at the school in Collon because they were considered '*works of taste*' and '*therefore not considered essential to all*'.[79] Or perhaps Anne was not amongst those who, in order to complete the final division, had '*been most diligent and successful in their progress through the Plain-work Classes*'.[80] Or maybe she was not one of the young women who, '*from particular circumstances, seem likely to find such knowledge beneficial or profitable*'.[81] Anne certainly seems to have been successful in her progress; however, we do not know how long it took her to complete the first three divisions. In 1840 Anne turned 20 and would have been working, perhaps as a housemaid, as she states her profession in the ships' manifest. What we do know is Anne treasured her needlework specimen book, packing it in her luggage when she emigrated to Australia as an assisted migrant. Establishing herself in her new home, the book would have been a useful and valued item that assisted her in the needlework duties that she would have undertaken throughout her life.

75 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 1.
76 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 1.
77 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 2.
78 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 2.
79 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 12.
80 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 12.
81 The Board of National Education. (1835), p. 12.

Conclusion

Very little has been written about these specimen books, let alone a focused study on one book and its contents. While the published books provide the written instructions for the curriculum Anne was being taught, not all of them contain specimens. Aside from a few exceptions, those that do can no longer be traced to an identifiable maker. This further singles out Anne's book for its ability to open a window onto aspects of a young working-class woman's life where few, if any, other informal records survive.[82] The existence of Anne's book, with its specimens and numbered exercises, prompted questions which led to the identification of the newly formulated national curriculum for working-class girls that Anne was following when she created her needlework specimen book at the Female Free School in Collon. The exercises that Anne completed are, in the first place, evidence of her progression through the free school national curriculum, but pinned into the book they became a future guide to which the maker could refer to and use to pass on her knowledge. The curriculum served to standardise the tasks. In doing so, it also enabled the students who had learnt the tasks to then supervise others. Travelling to a new home, Anne Trotter not only brought her precious book of needlework specimens with her, but also the skills she had been taught within those pages.

In addition, as a rare surviving item of material culture that was brought by an Irish emigrant to Australia, Anne's book provides a thread back to the shores of Ireland in 1840, prior to the Great Famine. This family chose Australia at a time when the overwhelming choice for British and Irish emigrants was to emigrate to America or Canada. We can surmise that Anne's book was a reminder of the home she had left in 1844 when she made the one-way voyage to Australia. While little is known of Anne's life in Australia, records show that she married George Thomas Windsor at the Presbyterian Church, Geelong, on 8 November 1850 and the couple had two children, Elizabeth and John, born 1854 and 1856 respectively.[83] Anne and the Trotter family remained in the region west of Geelong, living around Mount Duneed, Colac and Camperdown.[84] Anne died on 22 January 1910 at the age of 89 and is buried in Mount Moriac Cemetery, not far from Barrabool Hills where she first settled with her family in 1844.[85] It is not known whether Anne was ever formally employed in Australia in a position where she may have applied the needlework skills she was taught in Ireland. However, sewing would have been a vital part of her home life as she raised her children and attended to domestic needlework — stitching household linen and furnishings and making, altering and mending clothes for the family.

82 This point is made in relation to similar articles — needlework specimens and a pair of drawers — stitched by two working-class girls in England in the late nineteenth century. Richmond, V. (2019). Stitching women: Unpicking histories of Victorian clothes. In H. Greig, J. Hamlett, & L. Hannan. (Eds.), *Gender and material culture in Britain since 1600*. Bloomsbury, p. 90–1. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350495678.ch-005

83 Births Deaths and Marriages Victoria. *Search Your Family History*. https://www.bdm.vic.gov.au/search-your-family-history, accessed 12 April 2025; Married. (1850, November 13). *Geelong Advertiser*, p. 2.

84 Museums Victoria. (n.d.). HT 36147, Needlework specimen book — Anne Trotter, Collon, County Louth, Ireland, 1840, https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/2027802, accessed 10 March 2025.

85 Find a Grave. (2016). *Ann Windsor*. https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/158946808/ann-windsor#source, accessed 12 April 2025.

DR MOYA MCFADZEAN

Finding common ground: Engendering a sense of belonging in museum exhibition spaces

DOUBLE-BLIND PEER REVIEWED

In 2016 Museums Victoria undertook consultation to inform the development of an exhibition for the Immigration Museum about post-World War II British migration. During one focus group a participant observed that an exhibition on this topic would simply be '*telling white stories in a brown space*'.[1] The complexity of this statement, and its implications for supporting experiences of belonging for visitors, has always remained with me and acted as a touchstone for subsequent exhibitions. It captures the potential of, and the challenges for, a museum such as the Immigration Museum. It speaks to community ownership of the space — a deep feeling of belonging, yet not necessarily a collective one. It starkly poses the question: what do we mean by an 'inclusive museum'? It queries who the audience of an immigration museum is, and if this museum can push the boundaries of identity definitions and formation which are, to some extent, being constrained by its very name. These are the provocations and the subsequent lessons learnt from specific experiences of serving our publics which this article aims to explore.

The Immigration Museum in Melbourne is embracing more expansive understandings of our diversity, shared histories and ways of belonging. The museum is increasingly, as Elena Gonzales terms it, a '*first voice museum*'[2] of shared-authority voices which can speak to everyone, not just members of people's particular groups. Inclusivity is central to our practice, but we are still in the process of determining what that inclusivity means, as the following discussion will reveal. Respecting community authority is also a central tenet of the Immigration Museum, and at this point I wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which I work and where the Immigration Museum is situated, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Boonwurrung Bunurong peoples of the eastern Kulin Nations, and acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

1 Participant, Museums Victoria focus group for *British Migrant: Instant Australians?* exhibition development, held at Melbourne Museum, Carlton, 2016.

2 Gonzales, E. (2020). *Exhibitions for Social Justice*. Routledge, p. 142.

These acknowledgements are particularly pertinent in the context of any aspiration to create an environment of belonging at a site as historically and culturally loaded as the Immigration Museum. One definition of belonging is 'possession'[3], and the Immigration Museum's existential challenge is that not only is it situated on a site of dispossession (as indeed many of our museums and galleries are) but that the building in which the Immigration Museum is housed — a nineteenth century neo-classical customs house — is a material symbol of colonisation: of taking possession and of making a possession of Country. It was, and continues to be, an act of belonging for some, and an attempt to inflict unbelonging on First Peoples. Acknowledgment does not stop at recognition of traditional and ongoing custodianship and culture, but also includes recognition of land theft, violence, cultural loss and environmental disaster.

Another definition of belonging is '*a feeling of being happy or comfortable as part of a particular group … because they welcome you and accept you.*'[4] This is one state of belonging that we as practitioners working in cultural spaces all strive to achieve for our visitors, communities and collaborators. But this notion of 'belonging' can become a truism, meaningless if not regularly revisited in the context of our own spaces, collections and engagement practices. We can equate belonging in a museum context with welcome, trust, inclusion and safety; with providing audiences and collaborators with moments of acknowledgement and opportunities for self-recognition; and with projects resulting in genuine reciprocity. These are all laudable objectives, but constant self-reflection is needed to ensure our methodologies, collecting and exhibition activities are actually achieving those outcomes. It is also relevant to consider whether these belonging places can also have space for the uncomfortable, which can be about really seeing some people's 'unbelonging' and which then instigate challenges to other people's own assumptions about, or comfort in, their own belonging.

This article settles on Sukhmani Khorana's definition of belonging to frame the discussion: '*a situational and embodied feeling not easy to articulate*'[5], and one that entwines belonging, embodiment and affect to fluidly develop and change as visitors move through our museum spaces or engage with us as collaborators. To explore this further I will share four exhibition experiences from the Immigration Museum, where this form of belonging and the objectives outlined above have been, or are being, achieved. Some have yet unrealised potential, while others realised the very opposite of our aspirations. I have selected exhibitions in which I have been intimately involved as a collaborating curator and which collectively provide a breadth of insights into the complexity of the belonging project — a shape-shifting endeavour that demands agility, sensitivity, and deep listening and learning skills. These exhibitions have also provided a platform for testing and applying the rich museological discourse around belonging, empathy, identity and relevance to our curatorial practice at the Immigration Museum. Here, I candidly share what we have learnt, and continue to learn, from our endeavours to create individual and collective belonging visitor experiences, and to contribute to these conversations through real experiences.

3 Macquarie. (2017). Belonging. In *Macquarie dictionary*. Pan Macmillan Australia (7th ed., vol. A–K, p. 133).

4 Cambridge (n.d.). Belonging. In *Cambridge English dictionary*, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/belonging, accessed 8 January 2025.

5 Khorana, S. (2023). *Mediated emotions of migration: Reclaiming affect for agency*. Bristol University Press, p. 96.

Background

Located in Melbourne's 1870s former customs house, this significant neo-classical heritage building was developed into an immigration museum by Museums Victoria via State Government funding, becoming one of a suite of three state museums along with Melbourne Museum and Scienceworks. The Immigration Museum opened to the public in 1998. It was the second museum in Australia (following the Migration Museum in Adelaide, which had opened 10 years prior) to focus solely on the theme of migration. Exhibitions have been supported over the years by an ever-growing heritage collection representing themes and stories of Victorian and Australian migration. This collection now numbers over 10,000 objects, documents, images, oral histories and other audiovisual material.

Over the years the Immigration Museum has evolved from exhibiting predominantly migration-related narratives (and mainly permanent and linear narratives at that) to embracing broader themes through long-term and temporary exhibitions of identity, belonging, temporary migration and mobility, prejudice and racism, citizenship and social diversity in all its forms (beyond the parameters of ethnicity). There is also a much stronger representation of the experiences, voices and identities of First Peoples. Critically, what has also evolved are the collaborative methodologies of how exhibitions are developed.

Clearly these are all complex areas, and the stage is set for the challenges found in the dichotomy between notions of belonging and not belonging. Impacting all the museum's activities, aspirations and future directions are the practicalities of shrinking budgets and shifting audience expectations, alongside expectations of culturally-specific migrant communities.

Figure 1: Immigration Museum at Old Customs House, Flinders Street, Melbourne, 2024. Museums Victoria; photographer: Moya McFadzean. © Museums Victoria.

Belonging, empathy and relevance: some discourse perspectives

If museums are building, or are striving to build, spaces of belonging for visitors, communities and co-creators, then they are also aiming to invoke empathetic visitor responses through notions of identity that are multiple, fluid, deeply personal and broadly collective. In doing so, museums have the ability to provoke, support and champion a more open, inclusive, socially-engaged society. The following section of this article considers a selection of writings in museological discourse which examine such entwined terms as belonging, identity, empathy and relevance. They will provide a methodological context for the exhibition analysis to follow, and the means to test how the Immigration Museum has either effectively applied these approaches (through exhibitions, collections and curatorial practices) or fallen short in the endeavour.

As mentioned in the introduction, I drew upon Khorana's recent *Mediated Emotions of Migration* to provide a nuanced definition of belonging and what it can be, which has great resonance for the Immigration Museum and many other museums. Khorana draws on the work of Bissell and co-authors, observing that

> *... belonging is both a feeling and a set of practices ... a situational and embodied feeling not easy to articulate ... a feeling that is not pre-determined but one that comes into being through affective encounters, and acting in responsive ways.*[6]

Here is the entwining of belonging, embodiment and affect that is essential to a genuine belonging experience — a belonging experience that can evolve and shift as people move through our museum spaces or as people engage with our museums as collaborators. People can enter with preconceptions about their singular or multiple forms of belonging (family, friends, communities) but these can be reinforced, challenged and broadened through their affective interactions with authentic, diverse storytellers. And these storytellers can also be supported to share their experiences of belonging, and indeed *unbelonging*, in order to enable these interactions.

Khorana is interested in more complex understandings of belonging than are often applied, involving reciprocity and an active participation in the belonging process. This is articulated as a call to move belonging past '*a superficial libertarian focus on harmony ... to what belonging looks and feels like when the focus is on co-creating cultural safety through approaches that favour reciprocity and creativity.*'[7] For the Immigration Museum, this is a provocation to move beyond the creation of *safe spaces* where people can belong — whatever that might look like — towards *activities* where people can find their own connections and articulations of belonging as visitors and as content creators. Belonging can't just be a warm blanket thrown over our museums as a one-size-fits-all approach, but should instigate many moments of active, embodied belonging within our spaces.

Where belonging is mentioned, empathy is not far behind. I see empathy as belonging's partner, and as a methodology to which we are committed at the

6 Bissell, D., Bruce, M., Keane, H., & Tsalapatanis, A. (2019). Introduction: belonging unbound. In D. Bissell, M. Bruce, H. Keane & A. Tsalapatanis (Eds.), *Social beings, future belongings: Reimagining the social*. Routledge. Paraphrased in Khorana, S. (2023), p. 96.

7 Khorana, S. (2023), p. 13.

Immigration Museum. Empathy can support inclusivity, and even solidarity, amongst our visitors and contributors — as will be demonstrated through the following exhibition examples. Gonzales provides a useful launching pad for considering the nature of empathy and its inextricable connection to belonging: *'... empathy arises between individuals. Solidarity arises between groups. Over time, that solidarity can develop into a bond of community.'*[8] The idea that empathy is a starting point, and not an end in itself, is crucial, offering a path towards community and belonging.

Building on this idea, Elif Gokcigdem suggests that empathy implies a duality, *'a need for "the other"'*, so that we must create empathetic experiences in order to lead to *'common ground'*.[9] Otherwise the empathy can stay in the moment of privilege. Gokcigdem is interested in

> *intentionally designing empathy to create a more compassionate world through an awareness of our essential one-ness ... [Museums] are educational platforms for informal, multigenerational, experiential learning through proximity to a wide spectrum of authentic content and meaningful context ...*[10]

This point is key: to achieve those embodied experiences of recognition, reflection and emotional connection, our empathetic engagements need to help move people towards a collective understanding and a desire to aspire to a conscious universality, not harmony. The risk with this aspiration is a pressure to be everything to everyone and to risk nothing; it also assumes that this is what our visitors and collaborators want, when the path to a more complex notion of belonging can embrace differences in values, beliefs and identities. As observed by Steve Lions and Kai Bosworth: *'... when limited to the aims of broadening audiences and producing participatory points of entry for all people, the idea of relevance can become problematic and disempowering for institutions ...'*[11]

Consequently, the challenge for museums in this space of belonging, empathy and relevance is to bring people along, and to be brought along by people, and through these interactions and exchanges of ideas and experiences have the courage to become part of social advocacy and even resistance. The exhibitions I will now highlight provide the opportunity to reflect on how exhibition development and maintenance practices can support community experiences of belonging. The issues in particular I will examine, and to which I will apply the discourse, are: representation and authority through ongoing collaboration; external creative interventions to challenge histories and experiences of belonging and unbelonging; the importance of exhibition review, renewal and community engagement in maintaining a belonging charter for long-term exhibitions; and the value of applying universal human themes to visitor experiences, in order to engender collective engagement and empathetic belonging.

8 Gonzales, E. (2020), p. 12.

9 Gokcigdem, E. M. (2019). Preface. In E. M. Gokcigdem (Ed.), *Designing for empathy: Perspectives on the museum experience* (p. xvi). Rowman & Littlefield.

10 Gokcigdem, E. M. (2019), p. xvii.

11 Lions, S., & Bosworth, K. (2019). Museums in the climate emergency. In R. R. Janes & R. Sandell (Eds.), *Museum activism* (pp. 176–7). Routledge.

Belonging through ongoing community collaboration and authority: *Attache Case* as a collective refugee artwork

Representation through genuine collaboration can result in experiences of individual and collective belonging, as well as activism through empathy. In using that complex term 'representation', and the oft spoken phrase 'giving voice to the silent and absent voices', I acknowledge that we need to take care that our well-meaning endeavours are not implying a gift from the museum to communities, but rather a shared cultural heritage production with real outcomes beyond the mere presence of those voices. I refer to Bernadette Lynch, who suggests that: '*too often the museum's well-meaning agenda in working with migrants has the effect of subtly relegating migrants to the role of passive beneficiaries, even when ostensibly offering opportunities for collaboration and co-production.*'[12] In this case study I will suggest that belonging and empathy through representation is in the process of being realised: for the storytellers, by the amplification of their own voices and experiences via a central counter-narrative; and for the general public, through the ongoing building of layers of meaning via education and programming.

Attache Case is a collection development and exhibition project that began as a collaboration with Melbourne-based curator and artist Peter Burke in 2015 for an international touring art installation. The artwork is comprised of a repurposed doctor's medical case, which opens to reveal small drawers containing 41 miniature artworks representing 21 artists of diverse refugee backgrounds including Afghanistan, Vietnam, Poland, Hungary, Colombia, Sri Lanka, Iran, Egypt and Iraq. I wish to acknowledge the generosity of Peter and all the artists for enabling the museum to present and represent their artworks and stories in perpetuity.

Subsequently, we worked with Peter over a two-year period to acquire the artwork for the museum's collection. This included gathering the consent of the contributing artists, with the museum providing a modest monetary acknowledgement for this exchange to all the participating contributors. In collaboration with the museum's honorary associate Dr Anh Nguyen, we also documented the artistic intent and biographies of most of the artists. Many artists also provided a photographic portrait for the collection, which provides human faces to the artworks and stories. Through a range of artistic styles, all contained in a predetermined size and form, the artists convey their thoughts and feelings. These artworks expose the trauma, isolation and hopelessness, as well as the hope, resilience and creativity, of those who have endured the uncertainty of seeking asylum. Quoting Jennifer Bailey, Lennon Flowers and Emily May, this is empathy as '*the act of deeply and sincerely attempting to understand what another person is experiencing from within one's own frame of reference through the act of storytelling.*'[13]

12 Lynch, B. (2017). Migrants, museums, and tackling the legacies of prejudice. In C. Johansson & P. Bevelander (Eds.), *Museums at a time of migration* (pp. 236–7). Nordic Academic Press.

13 Bailey, J., Flowers, L., & May, E. (2019). Breaking bread and building bridges: Repairing ruptures in our communities. In Gokcigdem, E.M. (2019), p. 291.

Attache Case was born out of creating a sense of belonging, collective identity, and an artistic outlet for these voices. The power of creativity in this process is well articulated by Shannon Damery and Elsa Mescoli:

> *The arts are one of the most accessible conduits through which migrants may find a sense of community belonging, even when not granted any kind of official acceptance or citizenship. It can be a way to increase 'visibility', raise awareness about a certain situation, further political aims, or to allow one to seamlessly fit into community and find group belonging ...'*[14]

One of the *Attache Case* artists, Alyana Eau, powerfully reflects this point:

> *Through art, I can convey what words cannot portray and I express myself without boundaries or limitations. Art to me is more influential and powerful than any language, it is freedom of thought, and it is what my emotions speak.*[15]

The acquisition, documentation and display of the work continues that process of acknowledgement, visibility and public legitimacy. By layering *Attache Case* with portraits and documented voices, this collective artwork becomes even more active. Nevertheless, with representation comes ongoing challenges of what representation actually means for the long-term. Most artists are comfortable for their work, created in 2015, to represent them in a moment in time; however, some find they have re-invented and re-defined themselves, which creates a tension between who they are now and what the artwork was created to symbolise.

Some artists want ongoing engagement with their artwork and the museum, but this requires the museum to listen to and to embrace how they now identify themselves. Projects like this can lock people into a moment in time, into one particular identity, and this has been a challenge for at least one of the artists, Egyptian-born Tadros Hanna, who had to flee his home and is now an Australian citizen. He observed that

> *I want my journey as an artist to be as [one] from pain to hope. What I want to leave is legacy about humanity. Everyone is looking for a safe place to live and to belong to a place ...*[16]

Tadros's artworks, both for *Attache Case* and his subsequent work, are focused on presenting his own desire for belonging and his own agency in presenting his identity through his artistic practice.

So the question becomes: what is someone's ongoing agency in their identity maintenance, particularly when this relates to a static object? The collecting and

14 Damery, S., & Mescoli, E. (2019). Harnessing visibility and invisibility through arts practices: Ethnographic case studies with migrant performers in Belgium. In M. Martinello (Ed.), *Arts and refugees: Multidisciplinary perspectives* (p. 46). MDPI.

15 Eau, A. (2021). Quoted in Attache case [Installation]. Immigration Museum, Melbourne & Museums Victoria Collections website, https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/2562818, accessed 8 January 2025.

16 Hanna, T. (2024). Quoted in *Refugees, art, and activism in a briefcase: The story of attache case* [Video]. Museums Victoria, https://museumsvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/online-resources-and-tools/collection-video-resources/, accessed 8 January 2025.

Figure 2: *Attache Case*, 2021. Museums Victoria; photographer: Benjamin Healley; coordinating artist: Peter Burke. © Museums Victoria.

Figure 3: *Attache Case* installation, Immigration Museum, Melbourne, 2024. Museums Victoria; photographer: Moya McFadzean. © Museums Victoria.

displaying of fluid contemporary narratives can be challenging, and our experience with Tadros demonstrates the importance of ongoing conversations about identity between the curator and artist — and also with the public. A powerful panel session hosted at the Immigration Museum in 2023 with Peter Burke and two of the artists, Zohreh Izadikia and Mehdi Jaghuri,[17] created an opportunity for them to reflect on their refugee experiences, artistic practices, and their lives and identities now. Thus, genuine community engagement must be open to relationships of reciprocity that never end, so that we are creating space for the fluidity of authentic, authoritative voices.

The strength of *Attache Case* as a collective of stories can also be its weakness — the artwork demonstrates a breadth of people and cultural backgrounds, but it still keeps people part of a mass. They are defined first by being 'refugees' rather than as individuals with their own personal stories, perspectives and experiences. For some this was a moment in time and they have moved on. For others it remains fresh, sharp and painful. *Attache Case* artist Gyorgyi Marek reflects:

> *I suffered anxiety all my life ... I became interested in art therapy, energy healing and meditation ... My work helps me to stop, pay attention to my life and the world around me. I found my place where I belong.*[18]

The challenge for the museum will be to take care to always acknowledge that these miniature artworks were created in a particular place, at a particular time, under particular circumstances, in a particular emotional state, for a particular project. The artworks are static, but the people who created them are not.

The artworks and portraits, on extended display at the Immigration Museum since early 2024 in the *Voices Across Time* gallery, have enabled us to represent a diverse range of people and experiences, and to develop ongoing relationships that are providing platforms for the artists to be heard and seen. Immigration Museum educators are highlighting artworks in their onsite school programs. This has recently included working with one of the artists, Alyana Eau, to develop a first-person reflection on her traumatic refugee journey and the embedded meanings behind her artwork for secondary school history students. This will also provide another layer for the online documentation of the collection. Further, in collaboration with Peter and three of the artists, we also produced a digital story for display and online, supporting three of the artists to share not so much their refugee journey but to reflect on, and make sense of, their disrupted lives. This gives them agency regarding the questions asked and the framing of their own narratives beyond the common presentation of refugee trauma stories. This is the reciprocity and the authority that we want to embed in this living project, and within ongoing relationships — supporting opportunities for changing identities and new interpretations of narratives by the storytellers.

17 Burke, P., Izadikia, Z., Jaghuri, M., McFadzean, M., & Nguyen, A. (17 June 2023). *Refugees, art, activism* [Museums Victoria public lecture]. Immigration Museum, Melbourne, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XWH_dfyD7c, accessed 8 January 2025.

18 Marek, G. (2021). Quoted in *Attache case* [Installation]. Immigration Museum, Melbourne & Museums Victoria Collections website, https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/items/2562831, accessed 8 January 2025.

Challenging notions of belonging through creative interventions: *Re-Orient* by Pia Johnson

Creative forms of museum interventions can challenge what might be referred to as structural belonging, and assumptions about who could or should (and did or did not) belong in Australia. Through these collaborations, artists can offer a way for museums to examine their own spaces, challenge visitors to test their own assumptions about belonging/unbelonging and see the world through a different lens.

The Immigration Museum was fortunate to collaborate with acclaimed photographer, visual artist, curator and lecturer Dr Pia Johnson (with funding support from Creative Victoria) during 2023 and 2024. Pia initiated this collaboration and approached us with her project, and we were able to secure further resources to support Pia to realise her concept and install her self-portraits at the Immigration Museum. Pia's artist statement defines her photography and installation as:

> *a site-specific performative self-portrait series that uses the Customs House to explore post-colonial identity and migration. As a female Eurasian Australian artist, I 're-orient' myself through the physical spaces of the museum, its collection and architecture. The photographs investigate how we understand our transnational communities and stories, negotiate our collective histories and question how place can shift our sense of belonging across time.*[19]

The result was *Re-Orient: Reclaiming Spaces, Redefining Stories* (Immigration Museum, March–August 2024), which engaged with concepts of belonging and identity within a colonising construct.[20] Through this creative partnership, Pia challenged the museum's spaces and drew on our heritage collections in unexpected ways to further layer this act of intervention. Customs House, in which the Immigration Museum is housed, was constructed over 150 years ago on unceded Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung lands. It remains an act of dispossession, and a statement of colonising power and economic control — a symbol of the people who conducted business there, and the people who were dispossessed, processed, accepted and rejected there. As mentioned previously, the very fabric and history of the building creates an existential crisis for the museum in balancing its past and its ongoing symbolism with the narratives and voices we want to highlight today. The belonging/unbelonging tensions impacting First Peoples and non-white migrants, through acts of dispossession and racist exclusionary policies, are present in the building's walls and foundations. Through co-designed exhibitions and experiences, the Immigration Museum is working to confront these tensions head-on.

For over 25 years these spaces have housed joyful, sorrowful and resilient stories of First Peoples, migrants and their descendants. Through *Re-Orient*, Pia used Customs House as a set on which to assert herself, and her cultural and gendered identities. Her self-portraits interrogated the building's multiple layers of meaning relating to colonisation, empire and White Australia. In some of the portraits, Pia incorporated (with donor consent) migrant family photographs and documents from the museum's

19 Johnson, P. (2024). Artist Statement in *Re-orient: Reclaiming spaces, redefining stories* [Exhibition text]. Immigration Museum, Melbourne.
20 Johnson, P. (n.d.). https://www.piajohnson.com/reorient/wwp42h4npxtcamizikkmw9eowrd6zd, accessed 8 January 2025.

Figure 4: Pia Johnson standing in *Re-Orient* installation, Community Gallery, Immigration Museum, Melbourne, 2024. Source and photographer: Phoebe Powell; artist: Pia Johnson. © Pia Johnson.

Figure 5: Entrance to *Re-Orient* installation, Community Gallery, Immigration Museum, Melbourne, 2024. Source and photographer: Phoebe Powell; artist: Pia Johnson. © Pia Johnson.

collection, inviting the viewer to see the people in the photos — and, consequently, Customs House itself — differently. There is resonance here in Viv Golding's observation of the importance of museums in '*working with insider and outsider readings or interpretations, prompting diverse multi-sensory ways of knowing and seeing, and facilitating empathetic understandings in audiences.*'[21] Pia's photographs had her, and the people represented in the historical photos she incorporated, beginning as outsiders but ending as insiders, pushing back and out, and inviting the viewer to empathetically engage from their own location in the narrative.

Consequently, through *Re-Orient*, Pia gifted the Immigration Museum an invaluable opportunity to confront the legacies of a building steeped in its history of colonisation and White Australia — a museum in a building built on exclusion. These kinds of visitor experiences can only be achieved when the museum embraces challenging conversations, opens itself up to examination of its architecture and cedes the space for diverse storytellers and perspectives. Pia offered a provocation, a performative intervention, captured and displayed on the walls of the very architecture being poked and prodded. To continue the legacy-building, we have now acquired from Pia a selection of her work to bring these provocations into our permanent collection.[22]

Renewal and engagement practices: unbelonging in the *Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours* exhibition

For all a museum's best intentions, visitor experiences of belonging can be endangered when long-term exhibitions are not interrogated and reviewed, and when they fall behind evolving social and political discourses, engagement methodologies and cultural safety protocols.

Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours opened at the Immigration Museum in 2011. In some ways this was an exhibition ahead of its time, taking the concept of *belonging* as being in a binary relationship with *not belonging* and considering how this intersection impacts our understandings and experiences of individual and collective identity formation in contemporary Australian society. Diverse stories, many presented through video form and material culture, demonstrate how we find collective forms of belonging through forms of association; discover and present identities through creative practices; make assumptions about one another through first impressions; and show how prejudice leads to alienation — making being ourselves difficult, painful or even impossible.

The introductory experience is a corridor projection entitled *Welcome* by renowned Australian multimedia artist Lynette Wallworth. It sets up the exhibition's belonging/not belonging binary by having life-sized people of diverse culture, age, faith, gender and abilities alternately welcoming, rejecting and shaking visitors out of their unconscious biases and their assumptions about their own tribes. In reflecting on the piece, Wallworth states: '*We have the means via the smallest gesture to include*

21 Golding, V. (2009). *Learning at the museum frontiers: Identity, race and power.* Ashgate Publishing, p. 43.

22 Museums Victoria. (2024). *Pia Johnson on reclaiming spaces and redefining stories with Re-orient* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLNb1Ho8Y1k, accessed 8 January 2025.

Figure 6: *First Impressions* gallery in the Identity exhibition, Immigration Museum, Melbourne, 2025. Museums Victoria; photographer: Moya McFadzean. © Museums Victoria.

Figure 7: *Welcome* installation in the *Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours* exhibition, Immigration Museum, Melbourne, 2021. Museums Victoria; photographer: Rodney Start. © Museums Victoria.

or exclude and to signal whether someone is an outsider or not.'[23] All the people featured answered a community call-out for participants to enable us to create this work.

Welcome is a powerful example of affective embodiment; an illustration of what Golding describes as embodied knowledge: *'whereby the strange can become familiar, and the familiar strange'*[24] and *'... being open to being affected by that which [we] cannot know or feel.'*[25]

The work inverts our notions of belonging and disrupts our assumptions about how and with whom we think we belong and don't belong. It sets up visitors for the next gallery, which considers how we make assumptions about people from our first impressions and how we find ways to belong through diverse collective affiliations. These themes are presented through the authentic voices of numerous storytellers of layered social and cultural diversities, which both fulfil and challenge expectations.

The *Identity* exhibition was the first at the Immigration Museum to present a strong social activist, anti-racist platform, and to overtly call out racism in the past and present. It also aimed to create uncomfortable experiences by acknowledging some people's experiences of unbelonging, instigating challenges to people's assumptions or comfortability in their own belonging. The central experience within this theme is an immersive theatre presenting an enacted moment of casual racism on a Melbourne tram, which visitors can rewatch through the eyes of the perpetrator, victim and bystanders. This has been an enormously popular educative tool over the years and can be viewed on the museum website.[26] The experience demands discomfort in order to support visitors in understanding belonging more deeply.

The *Identity* exhibition continues to have much to offer in championing our multiple identities and standing against racism — and it needs to, since we have no budget for a major redevelopment of these galleries in the near future. Unfortunately, what became evident is that when long-term exhibitions are not interrogated and reviewed, they fall behind evolving social and political discourses, engagement methodologies and cultural safety protocols. We started to question whether the belonging/not belonging binary into which the exhibition is organised holds up, and we acknowledge that the central tenet of calling out 'othering' in society could actually be 'othering' some visitors. It was time to deconstruct one of the intents of *Identity* — to educate primarily white, privileged audiences — and acknowledge that this approach needs more nuance.

One installation drew pointed and public critique on social media in recent years. This display focused on popular culture and cultural stereotyping, and highlighted racist and gendered toys, games, advertising, consumer packaging and cultural appropriation. The objective was to demonstrate how our racist attitudes and behaviours are learnt and perpetuated through the everyday. However, while aiming to call out the insidiousness of prejudice and stereotyping in popular culture, we were alienating some of the very visitors we were wanting to support.

23 Wallworth, L. (n.d). Museums Victoria. About the exhibition. https://museumsvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/resources/identity/about-the-exhibition/, accessed 8 January 2025.

24 Golding, V. (2019). Feminism and the politics of friendship in the activist museum. In R. R. Janes et al. (2019), p. 128.

25 Golding, V. (2019). In R. R. Janes et al. (2019), p. 135.

26 Museums Victoria. (n.d.). *People like them.* https://museumsvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/resources/identity/people-like-them/, accessed 13 January 2025.

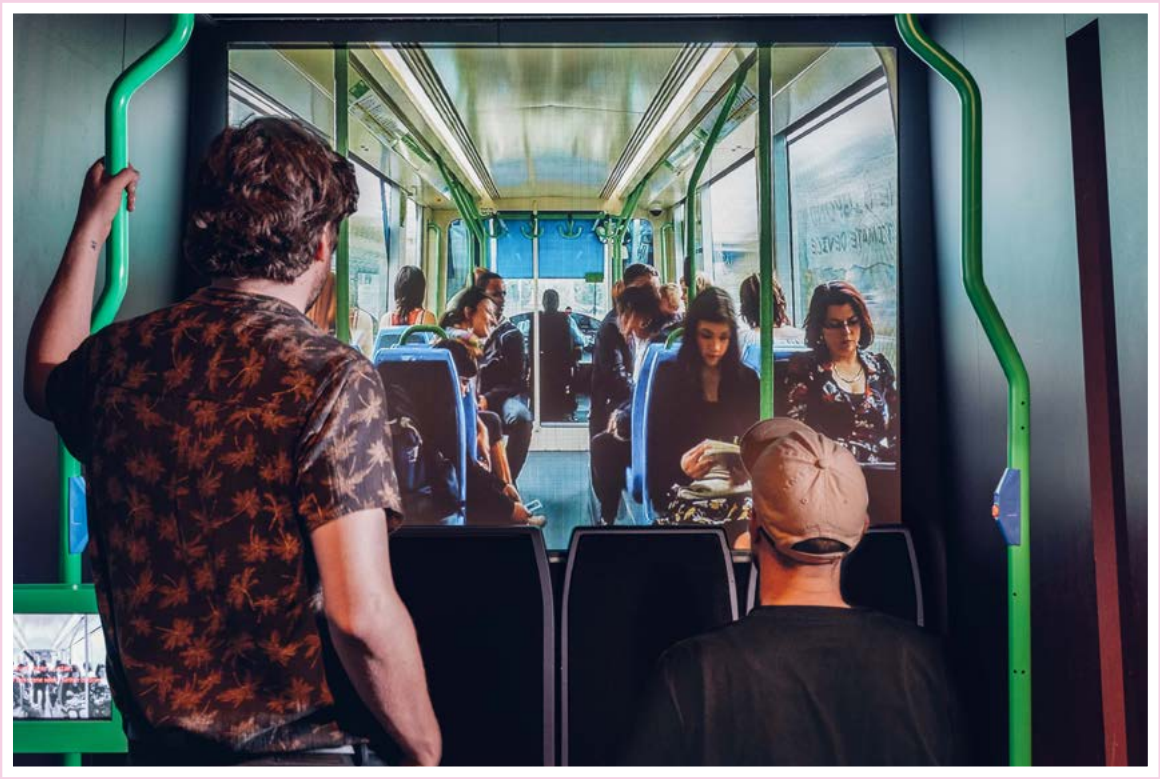

Figure 8: Tram interactive in the *Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours* exhibition, Immigration Museum, Melbourne, 2022. Museums Victoria; photographer: Joel Checkley, Tiny Empire Collective. © Tiny Empire Collective.

Figure 9: *My Culture or Yours?* installation in the Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours exhibition, Immigration Museum, Melbourne, 2021. Museums Victoria; photographer: Moya McFadzean. © Museums Victoria.

Golding has referred to the possibility of a '*third space*' in which museum

> *... experiences [are] created through interaction between people in a spatial location where they feel safe to explore creatively individual and collective histories ... even if the participants do not share all aspects of histories in common ... It can be a process of ... slowly dismantling the barriers of 'otherness' and recognising concerns that humans share collaboratively ... [This] ... frontier space ... requires the museum to facilitate relations of trust and solidarity.*[27]

And here is the crux of the problem in this section of the *Identity* exhibition: while amplifying the material landscape of othering and racism, we sacrificed trust and lost the opportunity for constructive, supported change. We put the racism of popular culture on display in order to expose how racism can be normalised, but we did that without warning, without contextual nuance and, perhaps most significantly, without the personal, lived perspectives of the subjects of that racism. Our exhibition about belonging and not belonging was, for some, a deeply unsafe space.

Andrea Witcomb has applied her intensive analysis of the use of affect in museums to *Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours*. Witcomb points to museum experiences which work by '*provoking unsettlement*', by inviting curiosity and by requiring a degree of '*emotional and intellectual labour on the part of the visitor through an in-depth engagement*' with an exhibition.[28] The space created for visitors to find empathetic connections with real people and apply their own experiences is what has made, as acknowledged by Witcomb, the *Welcome* and tram immersive experiences so effective. However, this space for visitors to connect, engage and reflect was omitted, albeit unintentionally, by the popular culture stereotypes installation — dominated instead by the brutality of the objects, the failure to contextualise them, and the separation of the racist object messaging from the real people both represented and impacted. Unlike the other installations, the display was dehumanising and the empathetic moment was lost.

The language style used on graphics, which had aimed to be deliberately questioning and conversational, clearly did not match the gravity of the objects and now felt trivialising. We were failing to bring everyone with us. We presented the racism, we named it, but we didn't move this endeavour forward through providing lived experience with real impacts. We had not been, as Golding observes, '*... sensitive to barriers for participation that prevent inclusive learning in the museum.*'[29] And this quote from Bailey, Flowers and May could have had this popular culture installation in mind when they observe that: '*... to consider from afar what someone else must be feeling risks egocentrism, ignoring the particularities of every individual and the array of experiences and trusts that inform who we are.*'[30] It is painfully obvious now that instead we presented the narrative at a distance, through the cold, hard artefacts of prejudice, without the human faces and voices to connect with visitors and engender that critical empathy.

27 Golding, V. (2009), pp. 56–7.

28 Witcomb, A. (2013). Understanding the role of affect in producing a critical pedagogy for history museums. *Museum Management and Curatorship,* 28(3), pp. 255–71.

29 Golding, V. (2009), p. 48.

30 Bailey, J. et al. (2019). In Gokcigdem, E. M. (2019), p. 296.

We offered no agency and we created an unsafe space that could be traumatising and re-traumatising. These outcomes were the antithesis of what we wanted to achieve, but for some visitors it was the outcome. And for all visitors, it is now clear, it was a missed opportunity for positive activism.

So the question became, as posed by Melanie Adams and Kayleigh Bryant-Greenwell: '*How can the museum create experiences that dismantle racism instead of putting it on display?*'[31] Instead of displaying the stereotypes, we needed to cede the space to actual people to discuss and counter those stereotypes, and provide a supportive environment in which to achieve this. The rest of the *Identity* exhibition is layered with diverse voices, all speaking to challenging issues, but in that final gallery, by stopping at the next critical step and in focusing on difference, we fell short of our goals.

The popular culture installation has now been deinstalled and replaced with video stories and graphics from a previous exhibition, including collaborators Tasneem Chopra (Melbourne-based cross-cultural consultant) and Richard Chadwick (also known as drag queen Karen from Finance) reflecting on their experiences growing up of belonging, bullying and internalised prejudice. Tasneem observes:

> *I remember the specific incident of bullying at the age of seven where my difference became apparent to me … What this experience taught me is that, number one, I owe nobody an explanation of who I am, nor do I have to ever question my right to belong.*[32]

This is clearly a more authentic way to engage visitors with these issues (whether through relatable or empathetic responses). Here is the road to collective belonging and true empathy, empowering visitors through great understanding and self-recognition — which was always the desired outcome. It is not about removing confronting histories from our exhibitions, which risks perpetuating absences and silences. We can engage without alienating, and challenge without losing that gesture of welcome to our visitors.

The *Identity* exhibition will continue its essential evolution. We can find guidance in Maria Vlachou's observation that

> *museums can create spaces with the possibility of meeting 'the other', seeing beyond labels and stereotypes. These encounters with real people can open up dialogue, tolerance and respect; they can create possibilities for realising that there are things that unite us as well as differences between us.*[33]

We have been able to find further opportunities for content renewal though important creative partnership programs such as the museum's Culture Makers initiative. *Threads*, a beautiful stop-motion animation video piece exploring Melbourne artists Kate Robinson and Maria Birch-Morunga's journeys to reclaim lost Iranian and Māori

31 Adams, M., & Bryant-Greenwell, K. (2022). No longer business as usual: Reconstructing relevancy through critical race theory. In J. L. Porter & M. P. Cunningham (Eds.), *Museum education for today's audience* (pp. 229–44). Rowman & Littlefield.

32 Chopra, T. (2024–5). *Identity: Yours, mine, ours* [Exhibition text]. Immigration Museum, Melbourne.

33 Vlachou, M. (2019). Dividing issues and mission-driven activism: Museum responses to migration policies and the refugee crisis. In R. R. Janes et al. (2019), p. 54.

Figure 10: *Being Ourselves* installation featuring Tasneem Chopra in the *Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours* exhibition, Immigration Museum, Melbourne, 2021. Museums Victoria; photographer: Moya McFadzean. © Museums Victoria.

cultural heritage, has a temporary home in 2024–25 as the exhibition's concluding experience. We are also continuing our active partnerships with storytellers from recent exhibitions, such as Melbourne creative Adolfo Aranjuez, in order to repurpose powerful content. Adolfo's reflection now concludes the *Identity* exhibition: '*What mattered was my resolve to navigate the world the way I wanted to, comfortable in my own skin.*'[34] These are small but important steps to bring fresh perspectives and relevance to a long-term exhibition.

Belonging and empathy through a shared-humanity approach: *Love* and *Becoming You* exhibitions

The broadening of the Immigration Museum's charter to embrace universal themes of shared humanity and diversity in all its forms has provided new opportunities for collective engagement and empathetic belonging. Universal-humanity themed exhibitions like *Love* (2018–19) and *Becoming You* (2021–23) assist this process through a first-person approach that brings storytellers and visitors together in unexpected ways. These points of connection and memory increase empathy by focusing on similarities between oneself and others, as Sara Konrath observes here:

> *We don't need to experience exactly the same situations as others to understand similar emotions as them. Everyone feels grief, anxiety, love, and awe … The practice of focusing on a 'common humanity' can be especially powerful …*[35]

This is the very definition of these two exhibitions at the Immigration Museum, which are universally relatable and created experiences of deep empathy and collective belonging for visitors and collaborators alike.

The *Love* exhibition was a moving and powerful exploration of this most fundamental human experience — resulting in one of the Immigration Museum's most popular and memorable shows. Historical and contemporary community voices breathed life and authentic emotion into historical and contemporary objects and artworks from the collections of Museums Victoria and Heide Museum of Modern Art.[36] The exhibition encompassed all kinds of love between people — family love, romantic love, love between friends — as well as the range of emotional experiences that love entails, from joy, comfort and intimacy to grief and sorrow. The personal accounts represented people of diverse gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age and locality, as well as people across time, to offer opportunities for deep resonance and connection with visitors.

The process of gathering storytellers to collaborate with the museum was a mixed approach resulting in around 30 stories. In some instances we started with the objects and approached the collection donors to provide the voices. Where objects had been removed from their cultural context, such as a group of beautiful Zulu love

34 Aranjeuz, A. (2024–5). *Identity: Yours, Mine, Ours* [Exhibition text]. Immigration Museum, Melbourne.

35 Konrath, S. (2019). *Empathy, narcissism and visual arts engagement.* In Gokcigdem, E. M. (2019), p. 75.

36 McFadzean, M. (2018). Past Exhibition – *Love*, Immigration Museum, 1 Dec 2018–28 Apr 2019. Museums Victoria Collections, https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/16604, accessed 13 January 2025.

Figure 11: *Love* exhibition, Immigration Museum, Melbourne, 2019. Museums Victoria; photographer: Benjamin Healley. © Museums Victoria.

Figure 12: *Rewriting the Rules, Becoming You* exhibition, Immigration Museum, Melbourne, 2021. Museums Victoria; photographer: Cesur Sanli. © Museums Victoria.

Figure 13: *Putting on a Show, Becoming You* exhibition, Immigration Museum, Melbourne, 2021. Museums Victoria; photographer: Cesur Sanli. © Museums Victoria.

Figure 14: Visitors interacting with story cards in the *Love* exhibition, Immigration Museum, Melbourne, 2019. Museums Victoria; photographer: Moya McFadzean. © Museums Victoria.

beadworks, we worked with local communities to find an appropriate storyteller in South Africa to reconnect these items to culture and community. We also approached creatives to lend their objects of meaning in order to speak to their love experience. The design solution was warm and welcoming, and the intimacy of the experience was further achieved through the first-person storytelling delivered via a tailored digital guide, directly connecting visitors to storytellers.

Love was an exercise in 'intentional intersectionality', which successfully opened audiences up to not only seeing and hearing their own stories in unexpected ways, but also engendered an environment of collective solidarity, bringing people back to their commonality rather than differences. In reflecting on methodologies of shared authority and empathy that work for social justice, Gonzales suggests that we can

> *... explode categories that hinder empathy and solidarity and retain those that band groups and individuals together. This is about using intersectionality intentionally for practical purposes — exposing relationships visitors may not have known they had, helping to build new ones, and helping to dissolve group identities that do not support the work for social justice.'*[37]

Love worked because the storytellers were authentic, and generously willing to share their emotions and experiences — they were real, and therefore visitor responses were real and powerful.

Similarly, the next exhibition in this universal shared humanity series, *Becoming You: An Incomplete Guide*, presented 71 coming-of-age stories though this intersectional approach. Stories for this project were gathered through an online community call-out, and fell into natural groupings around pushing boundaries, dreams, milestones, activism, sex and bodies, performance and self-expression, and belonging. They were presented in textual, audio and video form, some with objects. As a collective, they offered an emotional register that was as diverse as the stories and people who shared them. Environments for each theme were intimate and immersive, and we worked with local creatives as well as our own designers to develop soundscapes and aesthetics.

Whether an impression of a library to represent rules or a warm, tactile space to embrace often challenging body-related stories, physical immersion was key to amplifying the power of the authentic voices. A theatre space presented five storytellers on a one-to-one human scale — so visitors felt they were being directly addressed by the storytellers. Stories included first love, first pay packet, first time as a pallbearer; rebelling against climate change inaction and bullying; becoming a woman, a dancer, a drag queen, an astronomer, a muso, a cool wheelchair user; rediscovering culture.

The final presentation of the stories was the result of constant collaboration. Some stories were deeply private, and we were extremely aware that the storytellers were entrusting the museum with their stories: to take care of them, honour them and create environments to encourage visitors to do the same. The empathetic value of first-person voices and methodologies offers space for conversations, while still

37 Gonzales, E. (2020), p. 163.

negotiating such issues as racism. The power of this approach was witnessed (as it was in the *Love* exhibition) by the engagement of visitors through a simple 'leave your love' or 'coming-of-age story' on cards displayed in the space. These cards acted as an ongoing layering of the exhibitions, validating community stories and demonstrating the impact of affect. Indeed, in *Becoming You*, the catharsis and safety revealed by some visitor cards resulted in the need for careful moderation by floor staff to achieve a balance between inclusivity and the potential for re-traumatising other visitors, and we retrospectively installed a label explaining this process transparently to our audiences.

Here we have the creation of a genuinely shared space for visitors and storytellers alike, offering, states Riccardo Manzotti, *'... an opportunity for a deeper experience by allowing people to share a common existential space in which they can transcend their individuality...'*[38] This shared space enables empathy to lead *'to the emergence of a shared space in which people feel what others feel and, crucially, to what other visitors are.'*[39] This feels like the very essence of belonging.

Conclusion

The exhibitions shared in this article have aimed to offer some useful ideas and lessons from our experiences at the Immigration Museum. In terms of my curatorial practice, these projects have been enormously formative. From the *Attache Case* acquisition and installation project, I have been reminded that personal identity evolves, that our collaborators must be supported to retain control over their own narratives, and that collecting practices — in the laudable act of preservation — can freeze living people in a moment in time. From Dr Pia Johnson and the *Re-Orient* project, there was the joy of genuine collaboration, and garnering the benefits of relinquishing authority and supporting the application of a creative lens on a site crying out to be pulled apart. From the *Identity* exhibition I learnt the hard way the dangers of not having a shared-authority interpretative approach, or indeed a nuanced understanding of the nature of belonging — best intentions in exposing racism don't always lead to empowering the very people we want to champion. And from the *Love* and *Becoming You* exhibitions, I found affirmation in the power of platforming authentic voices, exploding the assumed definitions of identity in an immigration museum, and witnessing demonstrations by visitors of a shared humanity in our museum spaces.

Honest self-reflection is (or should be) a never-ending process which, to be meaningful and instil change, requires constant collaboration — and the resources with which to make engagement genuine and lasting. We are currently interrogating whether our existing long-term exhibitions still serve our audiences and where investment in new content can come from. Community engagement practices in the cultural sector have evolved, and we need to evolve as well in order to keep building our 'belonging credentials' in our communities. At the Immigration Museum, we have accumulated much experience and insight, and there is so much potential to keep

38 Manzotti, R. Empathetic space and shared consciousness: Museums and the application of spread mind theory. In Gokcigdem, E. M. (2019), p. 49.

39 Manzotti, R. In Gokcigdem, E. M. (2019), p. 59.

transforming, decolonising, trialling, failing and succeeding. We have the opportunity to check, as Gretchen Jennings, founder of the Empathetic Museum, has termed it, '*our institutional body language.*'[40] Is it welcoming, is it conversational, is it representative, is it empathetic — is the Immigration Museum a belonging place? I believe so, but there is much work still to do.

An unpublished version of this article was presented as a keynote address at the Museums & Galleries Queensland Conference, Toowoomba, 9–11 October 2024.

40 Jennings, G. (2015). Maturity model. Quoted in Coleman, L. S., & Moore, P. Grassroots social justice activism in American museums. In R. R. Janes et al. (2019), p. 97.