ROOMS FOR THOUGHT:
RADICAL USES OF MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

‘Following a period of intense focus on the temporary exhibition, museums and galleries are again turning their attention to the vast potential of their collections. Rooms for thought examines some of the most revelatory and advanced recent curatorial initiatives with collections, undertaken both by artists and curators alike. We are delighted to bring Dr Clémentine Deliss to Australia to discuss her groundbreaking work with ethnographic collections at Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt, as well as Jarosław Suchan, whose unconventional curatorial approach to the collections at Muzeum Sztuki has brought great attention to this artist-initiated regional museum in Lodz, Poland. These keynote speakers will be joined by Australian and New Zealand artists, academics and curators in a program designed to look at the movement away from defined roles and methodologies through a number of case studies. This symposium is a must for those interested in museology, curatorial studies, collections and exhibition making. It is presented in parallel to Fiona Connor: Wallworks at MUMA, an exhibition which takes inspiration from the Monash University Collection.’

—Charlotte Day and Tara McDowell

This symposium is presented by MUMA [Monash University Museum of Art] and the Curatorial Practice Program at MADA [Monash Art Design and Architecture] in association with University Art Museums Australia [UAMA]. Convened by Charlotte Day, Director, MUMA and Tara McDowell, Associate Professor and Director, Curatorial Practice, MADA.

FRIDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 2014

5.00–5.45PM: WELCOME DRINKS AND EXHIBITION VIEWING

Fiona Connor: Wallworks
MUMA, Ground Floor, Building F, Monash University, Caulfield campus

6.00PM-7.30PM: UAMA KEYNOTE LECTURE
Lecture Theatre G1.04, Building G, Monash University, Caulfield campus

Dr Clémentine Deliss, Director, Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt
—Towards a contemporary research methodology for the post-ethnographic museum

In 2014, an ethnographic museum appears to be out of time, its collections unable to combine with current concepts of post-colonial contemporaneity. What can one do to break down this stasis and dislodge the anachronism embedded within its collections? Is it possible for the artefacts in an ethnographic museum to act as a reservoir from which to constitute new methodologies of experimental research into visual and material culture? How does one build a new collection around one from the past that is so vehemently contested?

Clémentine Deliss will consider these questions as they relate to the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt, where she has been Director since 2010. The strategy of the Weltkulturen Museum is to remediate, in other words, to address the deficient situation around its collections by activating a working methodology of production, which includes multiples interlocutors, different media and a plurality of idioms of interpretation. The result of this dialogical and recursive work of assembling and remediating provides the basis for a new understanding of the research collection and ultimately, the foundation of a future ‘Museum-University’.

Clémentine Deliss has been brought to Australia by Monash University and her keynote lecture in Melbourne is presented in association with University Art Museums Australia [UAMA].

Moderator: Professor Nikos Papastergiadis, School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne
MONASH UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF ART

ROOMS FOR THOUGHT: RADICAL USES OF MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

SATURDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2014

9:00AM-9:30AM: REGISTRATION
Ground Floor, Building G, Monash University, Caulfield campus

9:30AM-9:40AM: WELCOME
Charlotte Day, Director, MUMA

9:40AM-10:00AM: INTRODUCTION
Tara McDowell, Associate Professor and Director, Curatorial Practice, MADA

10:00AM-11:00AM LECTURE
Jacek Nowak, Director of Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz, Poland
—Building on the radical history of the Muzeum Sztuki

Muzeum Sztuki was founded by a group of radical Polish artists and poets who, in the 1920s and 30s, put together the first public collection of European avant-garde art. The challenge for the museum today is how to make this gesture and the avant-garde (as well as neo-avant-garde) heritage socially relevant and significant to a present-day public. Suchan will discuss different models of working with the Muzeum Sztuki collections, and present examples of its artistic, community and educational projects. He will also consider the possibilities for art collections more broadly, as a resource that allows us to understand the world and shape our relation to it, in a way that is different from those proposed by other cognitive systems (science, religion, propaganda, politics etc).

Moderator: Dr Daniel Palmer, Senior Lecturer, Art Theory Program, MADA

11:20AM-11:45AM MORNING BREAK

11:45-12:30PM LECTURE
Patrick Pound, Artist
—To collect is to gather your thoughts through things (spellcheck wants to change curating to curating)

This paper unpacks the collection as artwork, will briefly look at how artists have put ideas of collecting and curating to the test, and will investigate some of the established ideas around this tradition, rethinking how artworks, which perform as collections, might make trouble for the work of curating and collecting, and making sense of things—as if on a dare.

12:30PM-1:30PM: LUNCH
MUMA, Ground Floor, Building F, Monash University, Caulfield campus

CASE STUDIES

1:30PM-1:50PM: CASE STUDY 1
Sarah Farrar, Acting Senior Curator Art / Curator Contemporary Art, New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, and PhD Candidate, Curatorial Practice, MADA
—People in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones: Remixing collections with Lina Bo Bardi, The Van Abbemuseum and Fiona Connor

Architect-curator Lina Bo Bardi’s ambitious Pictures Gallery at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (opened in 1968) provides a powerful alternative model to the prevailing chronological or thematic approach to displaying museum art collections. This paper examines Bo Bardi’s project in light of two recent re-stagings at the Van Abbemuseum, the Netherlands, in 2010 and 2011, and in relation to contemporary New Zealand artist Fiona Connor’s Untitled (mural design) (2012) at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery.

1:50PM-2:20PM: CASE STUDY 2
Brook Andrew, Artist
Holly Williams, Independent Curator, and PhD Candidate, Curatorial Practice, MADA
—Really useful knowledge

The title of this conversation is appropriated from an upcoming exhibition at the Reina Sofia in Madrid featuring the work of Brook Andrew. Really useful knowledge originated with workers’ awareness of the need for self-education in the early 19th century. Brook’s installation engages Spanish and Australian histories through displaying institutional and personal archives: Brook and Holly will speak of their practices in relation to the archive, and the relationship between the ‘really useful knowledge’ on display and the work of a wider range of contemporary artists. 

2:20-2:40PM: DISCUSSION
Brook Andrew, Sarah Farrar and Holly Williams
Moderator: David Cross, Professor of Visual Arts, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University

2:45-3:15PM: AFTERNOON BREAK

3:15PM-4:15PM: BREAKOUT WORKSHOP SESSIONS
In order to change the day’s rhythm and allow for more intimate discussions with smaller groups, symposium participants are invited to select one of three simultaneous breakout workshop sessions, each of which addresses a topic related to the symposium.

Rebecca Coates, Independent Curator and Lecturer, Art History, University of Melbourne, and Jane Dever, Curator, Contemporary Art, National Gallery of Victoria—The collection in the biennial

A recent trend in international biennials has seen the co-option, adoption, or incorporation of collections within the temporary exhibition model. These have ranged from the inclusion of historic, ethnographic, or little-known collections into the biennial frame, or the co-option of historic museums and collections as a site in which to situate contemporary art. What does the inclusion of this material offer in this contemporary context? This workshop will explore some of the recent manifestations of the collection in the biennial context, including Massimiliano Gioni’s 55th Venice Biennale The Encyclopedic Palace (2013); Juan A. Gaitán’s use of Berlin’s Dahlem Museums’ ethnographic collections as one of three key sites for the 8th Berlin Biennial (2014); and Manifesta 10 (2014), curated by Kasper Konig and presented within the historic St Petersburg State Hermitage Museum.

Sean Dockray, Artist and PhD Candidate, Victorian College of the Arts—When metadata becomes form

With a broad understanding of “digitization”—taking both things that are encoded digitally, as well as physical things that are tracked, represented, circulated and otherwise controlled algorithmically—this session initiates a discussion around the growing importance of metadata and databases, in contexts as diverse as museum collections and national security. Metadata, or ‘data about data’, inherits from the traditional classification systems developed to manage museums, libraries, and populations; but what are the particular urgencies emerging from metadata specifically? Is it possible to continue to speak meaningfully about artists, curators, audiences, institutions, or even critique within a society governed by metadata?

Charlotte Day, Director, MUMA, and Tara McDowell, Associate Professor and Director, Curatorial Practice, MADA—How to do things to art

For some time now, artists have been invited into museums to work with their collections, in what surely must be one of the signal ways that institutions have internalized institutional critique. Behind this now common manoeuvre, which often does yield astonishing results, is the presumption that artists may take art historical, museological, and authorial liberties that curators may not. This breakout session debates whether or not we want this to be true, and raises issues of curatorial ethics and curatorial innovation within the museum—or, as Massimiliano Gioni put it in ‘The Limits of Interpretation’, how to do things to art.

4:20PM-5:10PM: CLOSING LECTURE
Justin Paton, Head of International Art, Art Gallery of New South Wales—The rad and the trad: Field notes from a collection rehang

Justin Paton will offer ‘field notes’ from a collection rehang that is taking place right now at the AGNSW’s Asian galleries. Eschewing the geographical and chronological frameworks that have traditionally structured those collection displays, this rehang brings together Asian art of the past and the present in a series of playful and provocative conversations. One month out from the exhibition’s opening, Paton talks about ‘constructive opportunism’, the ‘dangers of didacticism’, and ‘the joy of juxtaposition’—in short, the risks, challenges and pleasures of doing collection displays differently.

5:10PM-5:30PM: CLOSING DISCUSSION & REMARKS
Charlotte Day, Tara McDowell and Justin Paton
SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

BROOK ANDREW
Brook Andrew is a conceptually driven artist who collaborates with urban space, choreographers, architects and artisans. He challenges cultural and historical perception, using installation, text and image to comment on local and global issues relating to public space, race, consumerism and history. As well as drawing inspiration from public media and found archival collections, Andrew travels nationally and internationally to work with communities and museum collections to comment and create new work reflecting objects, concepts and local thought. Andrew has completed many national and international commissions, is a Georges Mora Fellow at the State Library of Victoria, a lecturer at MADA, and is represented by Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris.

REBECCA COATES
Rebecca Coates is an independent curator and lecturer in Art History at University of Melbourne. She is a Research Fellow with Charles Green in his forthcoming Mega-Exhibitions: biennials, triennials and documentas (with Anthony Gardner). In 2013 she completed a PhD in Art History on the intersection of art and exhibition histories. Coates writes regularly for Australian and international art journals and publications, and has curated over forty exhibitions, worked extensively as a curator in Australia and overseas at ACCA, the NGV, MIAF, and MOMA Oxford.

DAVID CROSC
David Cross is an artist, writer, curator and recently appointed Professor of Visual Arts at Deakin University, Melbourne. Cross has relocated to Massey University after 15 years at Massey University in Wellington NZ where he was also co-curator of the One Day Sculpture event with UK curator, Claire Doherty. His work has focused on temporary public art, and in particular, works that privilege haptic perception (non-verbal communication that involves touch) over the visual/sight senses. These works are large in scale and designed to activate sensory responses that wouldn’t normally be activated in artistic experiences. Other works developed for specific sites around the world could have titles such as Hold, Lean, Drift, Pump—all words that infer an activity.

CHARLOTTE DAY
Charlotte Day joined MUMA as Director in 2013. Previously she worked as an independent curator and was Associate Curator at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art [ACCA] where she worked on large-scale commissions by local and international artists. Her recent curatorial projects include NEW13, ACCA (2013); Sculptural Matter, ACCA (2012); Marco Fusinato, Artspace, Sydney and Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane (2012); Social Sculpture; Anna Schwartz Gallery, Sydney (2011); co-curating the Adelaide Biennial (2010); TarraWarra Biennial (2008); and projects for the Venice Biennale in 2007 and 2005. Day has worked across a range of public and private contexts, from advising on temporary and permanent urban-sited works to the acquisition of works for public and private collections, including Kaldor Public Art Projects, the Michael Buxton Collection of Contemporary Australian Art, and public artworks for the Docklands in Melbourne and City of Stonnington. Day has over seventeen years’ experience in arts management, having held positions of Director and Acting Director respectively at two of Melbourne’s key contemporary art spaces, the Centre for Contemporary Photography, and Gertrude Contemporary. Charlotte has a Master of Arts in Museums and Material Culture from Monash University.

DR CLÉMENTINE DELIÈS
Dr Clémentine Deliès is Director of the Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt. She studied art and social anthropology in Vienna, and holds a PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. From 1992 to 1995 she was artistic director of africa05, a contemporary arts festival coordinated with the Royal Academy of Arts, London. Since 1998 she was producer and publisher of the writers’ and artists’ organ Metronome, launched at places such as the Dakar and Venice biennales, Kunsthalle Basel and documenta X and 12 in Kassel. Clémentine Deliès was the director of Future Academy at the Edinburgh College of Art with research cells in Senegal, India, Europe, Australia, USA, and Japan. In 2007 she established Randolph Cliff, an artists’ residency program in Edinburgh together with Edinburgh College of Art, The National Galleries of Scotland, and patron Charles Asprey.

JANE DEVERY
Jane Devery is Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. She was recently awarded the 2013 International Specialised Skills (ISS) Institute St Petersburg Fellowship by the ISS Institute and the City of Melbourne, which enabled her to travel to St Petersburg to attend Manifesta 10 and Berlin to visit the 8th Berlin Biennale.

SEAN DOCKRAY
Sean Dockray is an artist based in Melbourne. Dockray was a founding director of the Los Angeles non-profit organization, Telic Arts Exchange, established for critically engaging with new media and culture. His practice radiates outward from writing - both software and texts - occasionally into complex platforms that involve many people over long durations, taking on a life of their own. Dockray initiated The Public School and AAAARG.ORG. He is currently a PhD candidate at VCA.

SARAH FARRAR
Sarah Farrar is Acting Senior Curator Art / Curator of Contemporary Art at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. A graduate of de Appel’s Curatorial Programme, Farrar was guest-curator at Foundation den Even hectar, and Under August 2007, was Curator at City Gallery Wellington, New Zealand, where she organised over twenty exhibitions. Farrar is currently a PhD candidate in Curatorial Practice at Monash University.

TARA MCDOWELL
Tara McDowell is Associate Professor and Director of Curatorial Practice, MADA. She is currently Editor-at-Large of The Exhibitionist, published and distributed by The MIT Press. She has held curatorial appointments at the CCA Watts Institute for Contemporary Arts in San Francisco, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. McDowell holds a Ph.D. in the History of Art from the University of California, Berkeley.

DR DANIEL PALMER
Daniel Palmer is Associate Dean of Graduate Research and Senior Lecturer in Art History & Theory at MADA. Formerly a curator at CCP, Palmer has written extensively on contemporary art and photography, including Twelve Australian Photo Artists (2009) co-authored with Blair French, and Digital Light (2014) edited with Sean Cubitt and Nathaniel Tkacz.

PROFESSOR NIKOS PAPASTERGIADIS
Nikos Papastergiadis is Professor at the School of Culture and Communication and Director of the Research Unit in Public Cultures at the University of Melbourne. His recent research focuses on the investigation of the historical transformation of contemporary art and cultural institutions by digital technology. His publications include Modernity as Exile (1993), Dialogues in the Diaspora (1998), The Turbulence of Migration (2000), Metaphor and Tension (2004) Spatial Aesthetics: Art Place and the Everyday (2006), Cosmopolitanism and Culture (2012) as well as being the author of numerous essays which have been translated into over a dozen languages and appeared in major catalogues such as the Biennales of Sydney, Liverpool, Istanbul, Gwanju, Taipei, Lyon, Thessaloniki and Documenta 13.

JUSTIN PATON
Justin Paton is well known for his book How to look at a painting (2005), which was subsequently presented as a twelve part documentary series for television. In early 2014 Paton relocated to Australia to take up the role of Head of International Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. For the previous six years he was Senior Curator at the Christchurch Art Gallery, New Zealand where he was curatorial leader for the complete reinstallation of their collection as well as being responsible for their award-winning post-earthquake program of public art installations and public programs. He was previously Curator of Contemporary Art at Dunedin Public Art Gallery and curator of the New Zealand presentation at the 2013 Venice Biennale by Bill Culbert. From 2000-2005 Paton edited the distinguished journal Landfall.
PATRICK POUND
Patrick Pound is a Melbourne-based artist and Senior Lecturer in Photography at Deakin University. His work treats the world as if it were a puzzle to be solved, constantly testing the limits of found photographs, and of sets of collected things, to hold ideas. Several years ago he began putting together collections of found things that, despite their differences, might be found to hold single and coherent ideas—assembling these collections into little (so-called) museums. He has exhibited widely in Australia and New Zealand since the early 1980s, with recent exhibitions including: Order and Disorder: Archives and Photography, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2008), Photographer Unknown, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne (2009) and Melbourne Now, National Gallery of Victoria (2013-14). His work is held in numerous public gallery collections in Australia and New Zealand including the National Gallery of Australia, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Museum of New Zealand, and the Auckland Art Gallery.

JAROSLAW SUCHAN
Jarosław Suchan is Director of Muzeum Sztuki Lodz, Poland. Previously, he served as the Director of the Bunkier Sztuki Gallery, Cracow (1999–2002), and as Deputy Director and Chief Curator of the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw (2002–06). As a curator or co-curator he has organised numerous exhibitions including Cezary Bodzianowski: This Place Is Called the Hole (2012); Neoplastic Room, Open Composition (2010); Pole, Jew, Artist: Identity and Avant-Garde (2009); Performer: Grotowski and Performance Art (2009); Katarzyna Kobro-Lygia Clark (2008); So ist es anders (2008); At the Very Center of Attention (2005–06); Tadeusz Kantor: Interior of Imagination (2005); Thomas Ruff (2003); 4 rooms: Gallery as a discursive space (2001); and Tadeusz Kantor: Impossible (2000), among others. Suchan is a member of the Polish sections of AICA (International Association of Art Critics), the Polish National Committee of ICOM (International Council of Museums), and CIMAM (International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art). He is on the advisory committee of World Art and is also a laureate of the 2009 Prize of Minister of Culture and National Heritage in Poland.

HOLLY WILLIAMS
Holly Williams is a Sydney-based curator, lecturer and researcher with a focus on the unnoticed or overlooked aspects of contemporary living and material history. As celebrations of curiosity through the profound and the mundane, recent projects include Living In The Ruins of the Twentieth Century with Adam Jasper in association with Cabinet magazine, Trace Recordings, Swedish for Argument, on the ubiquitous homewares giant IKEA and Creative Accounting which explored money and the economic system through contemporary art, archival materials and museum objects. She has worked across the visual art sector including at UTS Gallery, Artbank and Christie’s as well as artist-run initiatives Firstdraft, runway and MOP. She is an occasional contributor to Weekend Arts on Radio National and RealTime. Williams has Masters of Visual Arts from the University of Sydney and is a PhD candidate in Curatorial Practice at Monash.