CELEBRATING THE
SIR LOUIS
MATHESON
LIBRARY
TRANSFORMATION
ONE OF THE FOREMOST HUMANITIES LIBRARIES IN AUSTRALIA, THE SIR LOUIS MATHESON LIBRARY IS A HUB OF LEARNING AND RESEARCH IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCES, ARTS, EDUCATION, BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS AT THE CLAYTON CAMPUS.

WELCOME

The redevelopment of the Sir Louis Matheson Library marks a major milestone in Monash University’s commitment to create engaging, compelling and stimulating learning and research environments. Situated at a key point of the campus, the Matheson Library is one of the four original buildings at Clayton, and its redevelopment enhances the precinct around the new Forum courtyard, which includes neighbouring Alexander Theatre and the adjoining proposed Sound Gallery and Jazz Club.

The Matheson Library is refreshingly contemporary, with modern architectural details that complement the original features from the 1960s, including the hanging central staircase. An internal street unifies the Library’s three buildings and a three-storey void serves as its centrepiece, accentuated by curved tiled atolls. At closer inspection, the tiles can be recognised as a subtle representation of the pages of a closed book.

Among the vibrant hues, contemporary design, and conducive study spaces, there is much to admire about the Matheson Library. Perhaps the most pleasing is the incorporation of floor-to-ceiling display cases showcasing artwork and the Special Collections. Selected items from the Rare Books, Asian and Music collections adorn the display cases, located along key navigation paths. Adding depth to the experience of using the Library is a substantial amount of artwork from the University’s collection. The pieces on display throughout the Matheson Library all represent the theme, Narrative, reflecting the Library’s primary role in the arts and humanities disciplines.

Redeveloping the Library took many years of planning, design research and project management under the leadership of Cathrine Harboe-Ree (University Librarian 2002-2017). The result is a modern, innovative, and truly inspiring learning space for both the University and the wider community to enjoy.

ORIGINS OF THE LIBRARY

It could be said that Monash University Library began in the Vice-Chancellor’s home in 1958, when Clayton campus was just a muddy field. Slowly but steadily the collection grew, and graduated to a Volkswagen factory on Dandenong Road under the leadership of University Librarian Ernest Clark. Here, the collection grew rapidly and was moved to the ground floor of the science block in time for the start of classes in 1961. Of course, the collection just kept growing and growing, as did the student intake each year, and in April 1964 the Main Library was officially opened to operate alongside three other smaller libraries on campus for law, biomedicine, and science and technology.

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It was also the location for the Library’s administration and management offices. Several times in the past the Main Library was upgraded and extended in anticipation of rapidly growing enrolment and the high volume of student traffic. On September 21 1994 it was renamed the Sir Louis Matheson Library after the first Vice-Chancellor of the University.

Today, the Matheson Library is one of seven libraries on the Australian campuses. Over half of the physical collection, including several special collections, is held here, and over 8,000 visitors per day come through its doors during semester.

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Monash University Library contributes to the University’s goals of being an excellent, international, enterprising and inclusive university. Rapid advancements in technology have led to a preference for electronic resources, higher demand for computer access and Wi-Fi, and increased need for facilities for collaborative group work. The Matheson Library has been transformed for a new generation of scholars, providing open, technology-rich and adaptive learning spaces to cater for a broad range of learning styles and research needs.

These collections have been established through gifts and donations and as part of ongoing acquisitions in support of the University research and education. The new Special Collections Reading Room provides a quiet space to enjoy items from the collections, and for the supervised handling of rare and delicate items. The Gallery hosts exhibitions, functions and special events to truly showcase and celebrate community engagement, while the year-round atoll displays enable the Library to share a wide variety of rare items with scholars, students and the general public.

A MODERN LIBRARY FOR A NEW GENERATION

THE MATHESON LIBRARY IS PROUD TO MAINTAIN A NUMBER OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

The Rare Books Collection began in 1967 with the purchase of David Willey’s library of Jonathan Swift related books. In recognition, the café is called Swift’s and graphics used throughout the Library are from an early edition of Gulliver’s Travels. In addition to the early works of Swift, the collection contains many works of the 18th century. It has grown to over 170,000 items to provide researchers with primary sources and contemporary materials. These items are considered rare because of their age, value, or vulnerability.

The collection is particularly strong in literature, history, early medicine, cookbooks, women’s studies, travel, art, and politics. In recent times, it has expanded to include non-Western material in rare comics, science fiction, and ephemera.

RARE BOOKS

ASIAN COLLECTIONS

The Asian Collections together form a leading research library for Asian studies in Australia. The collections primarily consist of Asian language materials, focusing on Indonesian and South East Asian history and culture. Materials come from a wide variety of sources, including over 70,000 books.

The collection is strong in history, rare monographs, academic authors’ books, travel, art, and politics. In recent times, it has expanded to include non-Western material in rare comics, science fiction, and ephemera.

Music and Multimedia

The Music and Multimedia Collection boasts a large collection of resources spanning a range of formats. From music scores and vinyl records to microfilm and DVDs, the collection includes over 70,000 items.

Of particular note is the ethnomusicology collection, holding over 2,000 vinyl records, 78rpm, cassettes and DVDs. The collection has a strong emphasis on Southeast Asian, Indian and Indigenous Australian music. With many items can be viewed and heard within the Library using the available multimedia equipment, many rare and fragile items within the special archives, are held in the Rare Books Collection and can only be accessed via the Special Collections Reading Room.
A thread that runs through much of the art on display in the Matheson Library is that of narrative. These works, from the Monash University Collection, tell stories. Some of the stories are true; others are not. Some of them are overt; others are concealed. Many leave a space for the viewer, providing opportunities for personalised stories that connect individual experience with the images displayed.

The work of Indigenous artists has a strong presence throughout the Library. This ranges from art that continues traditional practices through to new work in digital photography. *Kulata Tjuta* 2012-2014 is a major installation acquired especially for the Library. The title translates to ‘spears in flight’, and the work comprises 277 hand-carved spears made by a group of senior men working with young men from the Tjala Arts Centre in the community of Amata in South Australia and with Jonathan Jones, a Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi artist based in Sydney.

Maree Clarke’s *Thung-ung Coorang* (kangaroo teeth necklace) 2013 revives a cultural tradition that had not been practised for more than a century. Clarke was inspired after seeing a historic photograph of a Koorie woman wearing a kangaroo tooth necklace. The work combines women’s and men’s business, Clarke working in collaboration with Rocky and Len Tregonning. At the other end of the artistic spectrum, Clarke’s newly commissioned large lenticular photographic prints use contemporary technology to evoke stories of country, family and history through images of her birthplace at the Balranald mission on Mutti Mutti country in New South Wales. Tasmanian Trawlwoolway artist, Vicki West, also maintains culture through her art practice. She has learned from elders to make vessels from bull kelp (kalikina), a traditional practice that is unique to Tasmania and therefore asserts and celebrates cultural survival. Photographs by Bindi Cole Chocka, Ricky Maynard, James Tylor and Fiona Foley also convey stories of place, identity, history and culture. Other works on display engage with issues of gender identity, sexuality and masculinity. David McDiarmid’s *Rainbow aphorisms* 1994 seem, at surface level, to be seductive and amusing pop art. But at a second look, their ‘rainbow flag’ colours and statements such as ‘Don’t forget to remember’ and ‘I want a future that lives up to my past’ are acerbic plays on McDiarmid’s own experience of the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 90s. Tracey Moffatt’s works suggest narratives but evade easy reading.

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