

PENELOPE COLLET

La Trobe University, Australia

Dans les murs mais aussi “hors les murs”¹: An Australian view

Introduction

In the Education Faculty at La Trobe University over 300 art works are exhibited around the walls and corridors of the building. This is named the F.M. Courtis Collection after the art educator who acquired the first works in 1958. The purpose of the acquisitions was to build a teaching collection for use by lecturers and student teachers. The collection was developed to provide examples of the stylistic periods in Australian art since European settlement across a range of art media. It was assumed that young people had limited access to quality art in rural regions and that being in daily contact with the works they would come to appreciate art which would then enrich them as teachers. The head of art education was responsible for the collection. Mr Courtis has been succeeded by four other curators in the last half century².

Recently, university management at the Melbourne main campus have clawed back collection funds accrued for conservation and acquisition of new works. To rationalise management procedures they have taken over the management of the collection from the rural campus at Bendigo arguing that the collection was the property of the university, not the campus, and therefore should be managed centrally. Despite research on the history and development of the collection that I have completed, which situates the heritage and moral ownership of the collection firmly in the Education Faculty at Bendigo, ultimate control now rests with La Trobe Museum and Collection Management in Melbourne.

Universities increasingly demand outcomes for funds spent. Sue Ann Wallace writes of the need to “justify the resources” provided by universities to support their museums and collections through clearly defining the benefits to the university or campus³. She

¹ D. Ferriot, *Le musée de sciences: quel rôle pour les musées universitaires*, “ICOM Study Series”, 11, 2003, pp. 17–18.

² P. Collet, *A History of the F.M. Courtis Art Collection*. A teaching collection on a rural teacher education campus (forthcoming).

³ S. Wallace, *Challenges for University Museums: Museums, Collections and their Communities*, “ICOM Study Series”, 11, 2003, pp. 28–30.

emphasises the need to consider the visitors' experiences and to develop a client relationship with the visitors whether they belong to the wider public or to the university community, to demonstrate the success of exhibitions and programs to university management.

Given these increased pressures, this paper explores the possibility of employing new technologies to ensure the collection's availability for teacher education, research and outreach to schools and the wider community. Such a project has the potential to ensure that the educational objectives of the collection will be met. As well, the project will support the case for the collection's continued presence on the Bendigo campus when the university recognises its value in promoting the campus, the Education Faculty and the teaching and research programs it provides for domestic and international students, as well as the wider community.

Background to the project

Economic pressure on universities and colleges in Europe, North America and Australia has led to what European researchers, Arnold-Forster⁴, Boylan⁵, Kozak⁶, and Lourenco⁷, have termed "a crisis" for university collections and museums. Since the 1980s, the move away from object-based teaching to increased use of information and communications technology (ICT) and financial constraints on universities (exacerbated more recently by the global financial crisis) have caused institutions to question the value of maintaining their collections. In an attempt to address the situation, Lourenco⁸ and Kozak⁹ have identified the need for research to document the history and significance of collections, and their identity and functions. The need for outreach beyond the university has also been recognised to establish "the sense of scientific and historical heritage" within the community¹⁰.

Throughout the twentieth century in America, public museums were seen to be not only educational but also as a means of improving society more widely¹¹. Meaning-making in museums moved from a didactic communication of objective facts to a dialogic approach, or to one in which individuals construct their own interpretations built upon

⁴ K. Arnold-Forster, *Museums for the Future: Recognising new relevance for University Museums* (On-line). Available from URL: <http://publicus.culture.humberlin.de/umac/2006/Arnold-Forster.pdf> (Accessed 5th March 2008), 2006, n.p.

⁵ P.J. Boylan, *Museums and Collections in Relation to the Heritage of the University* (On-line). Available from URL: <http://www.city.ac.uk/ictop/boylan-univer.html> (Accessed 7th April 24 2009), 2001, n.p.

⁶ Z.R. Kozak, *Promoting the past, reserving the future: British university heritage collections and identity marketing*. PhD thesis. St. Andrews University, Scotland, 2007.

⁷ M.C. Lourenco, *Contributions to the history of university museums and collections in Europe*, "Museologia" 3, 2003, pp.17–26.

⁸ M.C. Lourenço, *op.cit.*

⁹ Z.R. Kozak, *op.cit.*

¹⁰ S. Waltoś, *Invitation. Universeum Network Meeting* (On-line). Available from URL: <http://www3.uj.edu.pl/Muzeum/Universeum/index.htm> (Accessed 17th September 2008), 2008, n.p.

¹¹ B.L. Williams, *A Summary of U.S. Museum Policy from 1960 to the Present* [in:] P. Villeneuve (ed.), *From Periphery to Center. Art Museum Education in the 21st Century*, Reston, VA, USA: NAEA, 2007, pp. 58–65.

prior knowledge they bring to the experience through discussion and social interaction¹². In Australia, also, since the 1990s there has been a transition to a foundation of social constructivism guiding museum education¹³. The Faculty of Education Bendigo is well placed to utilise current best practice in museum education in terms of pedagogy and emerging technologies to enhance the visitor experience. The faculty has the capacity to provide courses at all levels of teacher education utilising excellent facilities including a designated art studio, the art collection and well-qualified teaching staff and instructional designers.

The art collection at Bendigo has been used as a teaching collection for the education of student teachers throughout the fifty years since the first works were purchased. The Faculty of Education has over one thousand students who move daily through its corridors. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to use these spaces for teaching, for discussions about the works on display, or for gallery walks and trails. The curriculum taught in Victorian schools requires students to study Australian art within the broader context of world art. District schools, for whom the collection has a particular relevance as Australian cultural heritage, find it increasingly more difficult and expensive to transport children from surrounding rural areas or from across the city to view the works. If outreach is seen as an important element to increasing the benefits of the collection to the university, simply increasing visitor numbers is not the whole answer because of the already high levels of student traffic in the corridors. An alternative means to the museum visit must be developed.

The project

Through the historical research completed on the collection and the background material to the works and the artists that my students have developed over the years, there is now an archive of information that can be digitalized. As well quality digital images exist for many of the works. Following the successful public exhibition, *Landmarks and Milestones: The fiftieth anniversary of the F.M. Courtis Collection*¹⁴, in 2008, much public and university awareness was raised about the collection. The exhibition was covered by all local media and some state-wide outlets. Now it would appear is an excellent time to further develop an outreach program for the collection using the internet. While viewing reproduced images of artworks can never fully replace the experience of seeing the original work, through quality digitalization of images and the extensive use of interactive whiteboards in schools students have access to a high standard of reproduction.

Many museums now have excellent websites where art works are catalogued and students are able to access information about the artists and their works. Furthermore, the use of blogs and podcasts allow students a level of interactivity that enhances engage-

¹² M.L. Buffington, *Six Themes in the History of Art Museum Education* [in:] P. Villeneuve (ed.), *From Periphery to Center. Art Museum Education in the 21st Century*, Reston, VA, USA: NAEA, 2007, pp. 12–20.

¹³ E. Bedford, *Art, Galleries and Education*, “Australian Art Education”, 26(2), 2003, pp.12–17.

¹⁴ P. Collet (ed.), *Landmarks and Milestones: The fiftieth anniversary of the F.M. Courtis Collection*. Exhibition catalogue. Melbourne, Australia: La Trobe University, 2008.

ment¹⁵. Teachers also benefit from sites such as that of the Tate Museum in London, with the ‘downloads’ of teacher packs, Power Point presentations and interactive whiteboard materials¹⁶.

In Australia, arts education in primary schools and teacher education faculties has been severely under-resourced and marginalized over the last two decades¹⁷. Changing government priorities in education have led to specialist art rooms being converted to computer laboratories and art specialists moved into classrooms as generalist teachers. Following months of lobbying from Art Education Australia and other members of the National Advocates for Arts Education¹⁸, the April 2009 press release from the Australian Federal Minister for the Arts, Peter Garrett, announced the inclusion of the arts in the new national school curriculum. It states:

Including arts on the national curriculum (also) ensures training of teachers is prioritized. This means greater opportunities for teachers to expand and update their arts skills and knowledge and also ensures students receive high quality instruction¹⁹.

Following two decades of neglect, teacher education faculties now have the opportunity to contribute to this renewal in arts education. In considering ways forward, the Education Faculty at Bendigo has a number of options:

1. Increasing the quality and quantity of art education available to student teachers,
2. Increasing professional development opportunities for practising teachers,
3. Developing resources for student teachers, practising teachers, schools and children to aid in implementing the new curriculum using current best practice in arts education.

Whilst education faculties would suffer from ignoring the first two options, La Trobe Bendigo is particularly well positioned to address all three options. My focus in this paper is on option three and the visual arts, although music, dance and drama are all equally under-resourced in schools. Newly graduated primary teachers have had a minimum of art education preparation and are replacing the previous generation of art specialist teachers who have retired. Teachers and schools need support with quality art resources.

Schools are well supplied with technical expertise and information and communications technology (ICT). Most classes in primary schools have access to digital projectors, interactive whiteboards and the inter-net through wireless technology. Regardless of geographical location, schools have access to electronic teaching and learning resources, an important factor in our sparsely populated rural areas. I suggest these tools can be used to provide quality support for children’s art programs when cost and distance make it impossible to view original works in public galleries.

Providing these resources will require a number of steps including accessing technical support and educational design expertise to set up the teaching collection webpage and resources and developing free on-line resources for all children and schools to pro-

¹⁵ M.L. Buffington, *op.cit.*

¹⁶ Tate Gallery (Online). Available from: <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/schools/> (Accessed 17 January 2010).

¹⁷ D. Davis, *First We See. The National Review of Visual Education*. Canberra: Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008.

¹⁸ Art Education Australia (Online). Available from: <http://www.arteducation.org.au/> (Accessed 17 January 2010).

¹⁹ P. Garrett, *Arts in Australia’s National School Curriculum*, Media Release. Canberra, Australia: Australian Federal Government, 17/04/2009.

vide a safe internet site to find out about the Australian art and artists represented in the collection. As well, a registration process would be valuable through which schools and researchers can, upon payment of a reasonable annual fee, gain access to teaching materials, interactive learning sites for students such as discussion pages and blogs, and archival materials for senior schools students, university students and researchers.

The registration fee would provide ongoing funding for maintaining and further developing the site and up-dating resources and materials. Some funds may be generated for collection conservation, special exhibitions or acquisitions. The project would encourage schools to book visits to the art collection, at times when the building is least busy, and would aim to provide support for teachers to optimize teaching and learning in the museum context.

The use of exemplars

A review of gallery and museum web pages provides rich examples of what and how institutions can offer when keeping their virtual and actual visitors' experiences and needs in mind. Sound principles in web-page design need to be considered²⁰. The following pages are examples, in my opinion, of quality design. Home pages need to be user-friendly with appropriate language for all users and eye-catching imagery to highlight current exhibitions or features to keep them fresh and lively (Victoria and Albert Museum, the Tate)²¹. They need to be well constructed and organised so users can quickly source information of interest (Musée des arts et métiers, Paris, and Gathering the Jewels, the website for Welsh Cultural History)²². Where possible interactivity should be utilized particularly for older primary children and secondary students for whom belonging to the online community is a strong motivation for engaging and learning (Tate Gallery, Walker Art Centre)²³. For teachers, online kits and resources should link to current state and national curricula, yet be open-ended to allow for creative use by the teacher (Tate Gallery, The Louvre Museum, National Gallery of Australia)²⁴.

²⁰ Psdtuts+ (Online). Available from: <http://psd.tutsplus.com/tutorials/designing-tutorials/9-essential-principles-for-good-web-design/> (Accessed 17 January 2010).

²¹ Victoria and Albert Museum (Online). Available from: <http://www.vam.ac.uk> (Accessed 17 January 2010).

Tate Gallery (Online). Available from: <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/schools/TateBritainYouth> (Online). Available from: <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/eventseducation/youth/default.htm>

Tate Britain Kids (Online). Available from: <http://kids.tate.org.uk/> (All accessed 17 January 2010).

²² Musée des arts et métiers (Online). Available from: <http://www.arts-et-metiers.net/musee.php?P=190&lang=fra&flash=f>

Gathering the Jewels (Online). Available from: <http://www.gty.org.uk/> (All accessed 17 January 2010).

²³ C. Harcup, M. Nesbitt, *Attaining The Holy Grail: How To Encourage Wider Engagement With Museum Collections Through Participation in New Media Projects* [in:] J. Trant & D. Bearman (eds.), *Museums and the Web 2006: Proceedings*, Toronto: Archives & Museum Informatics, published March 1, 2006 at <http://www.archimuse.com/mw2006/papers/harcup/harcup.html>

Tate Britain Youth (Online), *op.cit.*

Walker Art Center (Online). Available from: <http://www.walkerart.org> (All accessed 17 January 2010).

²⁴ Tate Gallery (Online). Available from: <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/schools/>

Louvre Museum (Online). Available from: <http://education.louvre.fr/edu/index.jsp> National Gallery of Australia (Online). Available from: <http://www.nga.gov.au> (All accessed 17 January 2010).

Significance

The significance of this project is that, apart from this contribution to school art education as already discussed, it will ensure:

- The on-going support and security of the art collection as a teaching resource in Bendigo,
- An outreach to the community beyond the walls of the university, as part of its civic mission in promoting the arts and in providing enrichment and education to the community at large,
- A “showcase” or “shop window” to the university to promote the faculty and the university to the public and future students, both locally and internationally²⁵.

It is expected that the university management will recognize the importance of the collection in affirming its authority, its civic contributions and the quality of its teaching programs, thus ensuring ongoing support for the collection from senior management. These outcomes would be important gains for the faculty. Australian Government funding is now at its lowest level ever for universities, having fallen from 58% to 40% in the last decade²⁶. Management is keen to rationalize any programs or expenditure that are not seen to contribute to the economic viability of the institution. The argument that the teaching collection can be used for marketing the university and improving its competitive edge is an important one to make in this climate²⁷.

Conclusion

Economic constraints on universities require that innovative approaches be adopted in managing programs and assets to justify funds spent in terms of increased returns to the university. For fifty years the art collection has been used within the faculty for the education of student teachers. For most of that time only limited use has been made of it by the public or the education community outside of the university. It has gone on public display at the Bendigo Art Gallery only twice in its history. It has remained “sur les murs et dans les murs” for the best part of fifty years. This project aims to send the collection “hors les murs”²⁸, exploiting the potential of new technologies to reach the widest possible audience. In this way the collection will help to meet the university’s strategic mission of community outreach.

The current renewal in arts education policy at both the national and state level creates new possibilities. These include the re-invigoration of teacher education in the arts

²⁵ Z.R. Kozak, *op.cit.*, p. 189.

²⁶ KPMG Econtech, Report Economic Modelling of Improved Funding and Reform Arrangements for Universities, 31/03/09. Available from: <http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/publications/policy/submissions/KPMG-Econtech-April-2009.pdf> (Accessed 17 January 2010).

²⁷ Z.R. Kozak, *op.cit.*, p. 189. La Trobe University Strategic Plan 2008–2012, Priorities: Community and Regional Engagement. Available from: http://www.latrobe.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/35573/Strategic-Plan-July09.pdf (Accessed 17 January 2010).

²⁸ D. Ferriot, *op.cit.*

and the provision of teaching resources for the new curriculum. Digitalisation of the visual art works and associated archival and historical materials, and the development of curriculum materials based on these will assist in achieving these ends. Quality educational technology and web-page design is central to the success of the project. To maintain the integrity of the art works, as the artists would wish, to provide quality art education programs and resources in line with best teaching practice, and to provide well-organised archival material for the benefit of researchers, these are the present challenges of the project.

STRESZCZENIE

Dans les murs mais aussi "hors les murs": australijski punkt widzenia

Na Wydziale Nauczania Uniwersytetu La Trobe w rolniczym Bendigo od roku 1958 istnieje licząca prawie 400 dzieł sztuki kolekcja. Jej historia i wartość naukowa są przedmiotem badań. Zbiory są skatalogowane.

W Australii, podobnie jak w Europie, zmieniająca się polityka zarządzania stara się przystosować do kryzysu, który nie ominął również muzeów uniwersyteckich. Zmiany te w wielu przypadkach odnoszą się do zmniejszania kosztów oraz uzasadniania podejmowanych przedsięwzięć.

Artykuł ten bada możliwości rozwoju i wykorzystywania wymienionej wyżej kolekcji, mając na względzie jej fizyczne bezpieczeństwo i konserwację. Wzorując się na przykładzie Musée des arts et métiers w Paryżu, oraz Gathering the Jewels (strona internetowa Welsh Cultural History), autorka rozważa możliwości zastosowania nowych technologii w wykorzystaniu tejże kolekcji do kształcenia nauczycieli, badań naukowych i pomocy dla szkół.

Penelope Collet



Fig. I. Gill, ST, *Bendigo from road to Eaglehawk* 1857, engraving 18.9 x 23 cm



Fig. II. Von Guerard, Eugene, *Moroka River Falls* 1860, lithograph 35 x 52 cm