

GOALS – LA TROBE UNIVERSITY ART STRATEGY 2016

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4.1 Collections Management and Development

4.1.2 Significance Assessment

Summary document to accompany the report
*La Trobe Art Institute Art Collection Project:
Significance Assessment*

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Significance is the values and meanings that items and collections have for people and communities. Significance helps unlock the potential of collections, creating opportunities for communities to access and enjoy collections, and to understand the history, cultures and environments of Australia.¹

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¹ Roslyn Russell and Kylie Winkworth, *Significance 2.0: A Guide to Assessing the Significance of Collections* (Adelaide: Collections Council of Australia Ltd, 2009), 1.

This document offers a summary of the key points found within the report, *La Trobe Art Institute Art Collection Project: Significance Assessment*. This report addresses a key priority in Section 4.1.2 of the La Trobe University Art Strategy and was commissioned in late 2016.

For comprehensive detail refer to the report in its entirety, including all references, omitted here for sake of brevity.

Overview

In 2016-17 the La Trobe Art Institute undertook the first Significance Assessment of the cultural collections (the Collections) of La Trobe University.

The project encompassed the Collections recognised to be under

- a) the ownership of the University, and
- b) the custodianship of the LAI,

and used recognised industry methodologies to assess these holdings.

There are three core results achieved from the process:

1. Identification and explanation of the significant history and worth of the Collections
2. Identification of existing areas of risk to the Collections
3. Recommendations to ensure the continuing integrity of the Collections, including rectification of identified issues.

This Significance Assessment confirms that La Trobe University possesses collections of substantial merit; holdings worthy of any institution in the country.

However, the report also reveals long-standing issues regarding the care and storage of the majority of the Collections, and in particular the art collections.

The following summary includes a brief outline of each collection, and excerpts from the report most immediately pertinent to the above core results.

Background

This is the first instance of a Significance Assessment being undertaken on the Collections of La Trobe University.

As stipulated in the LTU Art Strategy (July 2016), the La Trobe Art Institute (LAI) committed to undertake a review of collections management and development (page 4), which included an investigation into the significance of the cultural holdings of the University.

In September 2016 the LAI contracted two consultants to lay the ground work required to undertake the significance assessment, including compilation of comprehensive collection reports, quantifying content, researching and developing a stakeholder contact list, and establishing the parameters of the project.

In October the Art Institute commissioned Dr Belinda Nemeč to deliver the Significance Assessment of those cultural collections of the University recognised to be under the remit of the LAI.

These are:

- The LTU Art Collection (2413 objects)
- The FM Courtis Collection (324 objects)
- The Trendall Collection (87 objects)
- The Ethnographic Collection (854 objects)
- The Stewart Fraser Poster Collection (3826 objects)
- The Etta Hirsch Collection (238 objects)

The Collections are comprised of fine art, antiquities, cultural objects, and social history material.

Process

Significance is established against various criteria; collections, groups, and individual objects will often have varied significance levels when measured within certain appropriate categories.

This report has been prepared using *Significance 2.0*, which is the standard Australian methodology for assessing the significance of collections of all kinds, and of individual items. Assessments prepared in this way enable collection custodians, communities, funding bodies and any other interested parties to 'analyse and communicate the meanings and values of collections'.²

² Russell and Winkworth, *Significance 2.0*.

Dr Nemeč assessed the Collections under historical, aesthetic/artistic, research/teaching, and community, significance; her overall findings are as follows:³

Historical significance

All the collections are of historical significance in their respective entirety, due principally to their close connection with the history of La Trobe University. This is particularly true of the Art Collection, Ethnographic Collection and Trendall Collection in relation to the Bundoora campus, and of the F.M. Courtis Collection in relation to the Bendigo campus.

Many of the works in the La Trobe University Art Collection, Etta Hirsh Ceramics Collection and F.M. Courtis Collection are also of historical significance because they represent the output of historically important figures in the history of Australian art.

Aesthetic/artistic significance

A large proportion of the works in the La Trobe University Art Collection, Etta Hirsh Ceramics Collection and F.M. Courtis Collection are of aesthetic/artistic significance, as are selected works (such as many of the bark paintings and some of the Sepik River carvings) in the Ethnographic Collection.

Research and teaching potential

All of the collections have high research and teaching potential. This is particularly true of the Trendall Collection, which was created for this specific purpose.

Community significance

All of the collections have community significance to their campus of origin, that is, to students, alumni, and academic and professional staff whether past and present. This is particularly true of the La Trobe University Art Collection and the Trendall Collection in relation to the Bundoora campus, and of the F.M. Courtis Collection in relation to the Bendigo campus. The F.M. Courtis Collection also has some community significance to the broader Bendigo community, where it has become known thanks to exhibitions at the Bendigo Art Gallery, as well as for the input of local artists and donors.

The Bundoora collections also hold some significance for its community beyond the campus, although to a lesser degree: there are links with local artists and donors living or working in Melbourne's northern suburbs, while some other donors, although further afield geographically, feel a strong connection to the Bundoora collections that they have supported, sometimes over several decades. Local school and community groups have also become familiar with some of the collections by visiting the numerous exhibitions held at LUMA, the Borchardt Library and the Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, as well as the outdoor sculptures.

³ Following four sub-sections extracted from full report, pages 1–2

Throughout the course of the project, Dr Nemec interviewed the majority of stakeholders identified, and added other individuals whose relevance became evident during the process.

Contributors included:⁴

- Past LUMA staff
- Past LTU academic and professional staff
- Past LTU students
- Current LTU staff and students
- Past and present donors and lenders

The stakeholders were asked a set series of questions, and given the opportunity to provide additional information at their discretion. These questions are outlined in Appendix IV (page 203) of the report.

The Significance Assessment report was completed by Dr Nemec in March 2017, with final revisions undertaken by the LAI in September 2017; the document consists of 256 pages, features substantial historical information on the individual Collections, detailed studies of the significance of each, and includes supporting appendices, image listings and references.

⁴ LUMA – La Trobe University Museum of Art; LTU – La Trobe University

Collection Briefs

LTU Art Collection

The core La Trobe University Art Collection comprises 2413 works. It includes easel paintings (on canvas, board, aluminium, glass), works on paper (photographs, prints, drawings, watercolours, gouaches, collage, mixed media, offset-lithograph published posters), ceramics, sculptures and public art, assemblages and digital media works.

Most works in the Art Collection are by Australian artists of the mid- to late 20th century, and into the 21st century. Eminent names represented include Rick Amor, Howard Arkley, Arthur Boyd, John Brack, John Coburn, Russell Drysdale, William ('Jock') Frater, Leonard French, Donald Friend, James Gleeson, Bill Henson, Norman Lindsay, John Olsen, Clifton Pugh, Brett Whiteley and Fred Williams.

Particularly in the formative years of the collection, male artists were much more strongly represented than were female artists. Indigenous Australian artists represented in the collection cover various regions and styles (and include a higher proportion of women artists than does the rest of the collection).

The majority of the La Trobe University Art Collection is located on the Bundoora campus.

A subset of the La Trobe University Art Collection is 'the La Trobe University Sculpture Park': approximately 20 large sculptural works located around the campus. These date from the inception of the university in the 1960s and include works from every decade since. Some of these were integral to the original master plan of the campus, and they complement the architecture, landscaping, flora and wildlife – not to mention student life. The majority are by Australian sculptors, including notable artists such as Inge King, Robert Klippel, Jock Clutterbuck, Leonard French.⁵

A large proportion of the works in the La Trobe University Art Collection are by Australian artists of high repute. These are too numerous to list in full but a small selection includes Rick Amor, Howard Arkley, George Bell, Charles Blackman, Bernard Boles, Peter Booth, Boyd family members, Charles Bush, John Coburn, Robert Dickerson, Russell Drysdale, Leonard French, Bill Henson, Roger Kemp, Inge King, Lindsay family members, Banduk Marika, Sidney Nolan, John Olsen, John Perceval, Clifton Pugh, Arnold Shore, Tim Storrier, Rover Thomas, Napier Waller, Brett Whiteley and Fred Williams. Although it is beyond the scope of this assessment to rank the works by these artists in their respective oeuvres, it can be safely said that as a result of the high calibre of the artists represented, the overall artistic significance of the collection is high.

Condition and integrity (degree of completeness) are important when determining significance. Works that are damaged, deteriorated or incomplete can lose some of their aesthetic value. At the time of writing the main collection store is the 'North Store' in Glenn College. This appears relatively clean but the environmental controls (temperature and relative humidity) are of office standard, not museum standard. There is appropriate storage furniture (racking, shelving, plan drawers, filing cabinets) but the store is over-crowded with works. Additional space is urgently needed.

⁵ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 12–14

Works that I saw around campus were generally displayed in appropriate locations in hallways, foyers, large stairwells, meeting rooms, and offices, especially in the Chancellery area of the David Myers Building. Campus display always requires compromise (in terms of light exposure, climate control, access and security) in comparison to strict museum conditions. Outdoor artworks can suffer from damage over time. It is important to invest resources in caring for these works to preserve their artistic/aesthetic significance.⁶

The research and teaching potential of any collection depends to a large extent on the amount and quality of information available to researchers about each work, and indeed on the ease with which teachers, students and researchers can even become aware of the existence of a work. At La Trobe, the quality and quantity of detail of information on the works in the collection vary considerably. Nearly all works are registered with a unique alphanumeric identifier and recorded on the collections database.

There is wide scope for information from other sources (such as photographic files, finance files, Art Advisory Committee files, correspondence, invoices, historical photographs in the La Trobe University Media Library, exhibition catalogues) to be added to the object files and database, which would greatly enrich the amount of information available on each work.

The La Trobe University Art Collection was *not* founded as a teaching collection, but has been in the past, and could again be in future, a valuable teaching resource. The Art Collection has been used for cross-disciplinary research, teaching and publishing.⁷

The Art Collection was established with the intention of enriching the Bundoora campus environment and thus the lives of students and staff. People's affectionate recollections of particular artworks show that it has succeeded in these efforts, and thus over the years has acquired community significance.

Nearly all staff, alumni and other individuals consulted for this report stated that they felt a personal connection to, or strong memory of, the artworks displayed around the Bundoora campus, whether indoors or outdoors. In the words of one former student, 'it gives the university a cultural dimension, rather than just "rats and stats"'. She argued that students who are studying science and other non-arts disciplines benefit from an arts presence on campus, as it helps to create a well-rounded person. Many mentioned individual works with which they felt a particular connection.

The Sculpture Park Collection includes well-loved landmarks of the Bundoora campus which are familiar to all students and staff. They help form the backdrop to daily work, contemplation and relaxation. For instance, Inge King's *Dialogue of circles* is the backdrop to public performances and gatherings at the open-air Moat Theatre. The sculptures *The four seasons* and *Sofia* were located at the main entrance to the campus, while Allen David's glass screen was at the entrance to the Library. The publication of a guide to the sculpture park was very useful in encouraging visitors (such as school groups) to enjoy the collection and explore the campus. For these reasons this collection has a particularly high level of community significance.⁸

⁶ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 66–68

⁷ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 73–79

⁸ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 81–93

FM Courtis Collection

The F.M. Courtis Collection comprises 320 works, mostly paintings and works on paper (drawings, prints, photographs) by Australian artists, as well as some sculptures and textiles. It was originally assembled by Bendigo Teachers' College, which was established in 1926 and became part of the Faculty of Education of La Trobe University in 1991. With a few exceptions, the collection remains in Bendigo, with works on display mostly in corridors and other public areas of the Education and Business Buildings, and others in store.

As well as easel paintings, drawings and prints, the collection includes work in other media: sculpture, ceramics, textiles, bark paintings and photographs, as well as a selection of children's picture book illustrations that resulted from a biennial children's literature conference. Regarding subject matter, the collection's founder emphasised landscapes, as did subsequent curators. The works represent the major stylistic periods and groups of Australian artists from the mid-20th century onwards.

The relatively small number of 19th-century works also includes examples by William Strutt and S.T. Gill. The early 20th century is represented by Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts, Charles Wheeler and Harold Herbert. The collection is particularly strong in the work of Melbourne and Sydney painters after 1940, including such eminent artists as Arthur Boyd, Sir William Dargie, Robert Jacks, Roger Kemp, Fred Williams and Leonard French. Women from this period are better represented, and include Grace Cossington-Smith, May Neill, Jean Appleton and Elaine Haxton. This time of emerging modernism is also represented by works by the influential Melbourne teachers George Bell and Arnold Shore, and some of their students (Russell Drysdale, Sam Atyeo, Yvonne Cohen and Fred Williams).

Later modernist Roger Kemp and surrealist James Gleeson are represented, as are most of the 'Antipodeans' (Arthur Boyd, Sidney Nolan, John Perceval, Clifton Pugh, James Wigley and Fred Williams), and Melbourne social realists Noel Counihan and Bernard Rust. Works by Sydney artists include those by Lloyd Rees, Brett Whiteley, John Olsen and Ken Done. Like the La Trobe University Art Collection, the F.M. Courtis Collection has a stronger representation of male than female artists. Women are better represented among the Indigenous artists.

Melbourne abstraction has a presence through works by Dale Hickey, Lawrence Daws, John Coburn, Godfrey Millar and others. A small number of Indigenous Australian artists are represented.⁹

The history of the FM Courtis Collection, as outlined in Section 5.6, reveals and reflects the deep and multi-layered connections between the artworks and the community of Bendigo Teachers' College (staff, students, alumni) and the broader Bendigo community (local artists, dealers, businesses and art-loving individuals and families). These links are the basis of much of the historical significance of the collection as a whole. In effect, the collection serves as a record of the development of art education, appreciation, teaching, practice, and collecting in that community in the second half of the 20th century and into the early 21st century.

As with the La Trobe University Art Collection, most of the works in the F.M. Courtis Collection are of excellent provenance. Many were donated or sold at discount by artists, dealers of artists, or collectors

⁹ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 17–18

who purchased on the primary market or who were friends of the artists. This strong provenance contributes much to the works' historical significance.

The collection is also historically representative, as it also reflects broader, indeed international, trends in the philosophy of education. The historian of the FM Courtis Collection, Penelope Collet, describes how the trauma of World War II gave rise to the promotion of all the arts as an important element of education, of the formation of young people, and in the fostering of peace and international understanding. Efforts to achieve these ends included the establishment of cultural bodies such as UNESCO. The concept of education through visual art, particularly as expressed by the English art historian Herbert Read (1893–1968) was enormously influential in Britain, the USA and Australia after the war. In 1954 a UNESCO art seminar on 'The Role of the Visual Arts in Education' was held at the University of Melbourne. Key art history staff at Bendigo Teachers' College had studied or taught at the Melbourne Teachers' College and were exposed to these ideas, subsequently putting them into practice in helping to shape the FM Courtis Collection.¹⁰

The limited acquisition budget meant that Bendigo could generally not afford their largest or most important or characteristic works. Nevertheless, artists were keen to be represented in the F.M. Courtis Collection. Although this was partly due to the fact that their work would be exposed to young teachers who would go on to influence the taste of generations of students, it is also a tribute to the intrinsic quality of the collection. It is also important to note that the collection was largely assembled when high-quality works by established or emerging Australian artists could still be purchased at much lower prices than is generally the case today, and that many artists reduced their prices even further in order to be represented in this permanent collection. Although it was often necessary to acquire an artist's smaller or lesser works due to relatively limited funds, it is unlikely that a tertiary institution could start creating a collection of this quality today without a very significant source of money.

A recent report on the collection by collections professional Karen Annett-Thomas states that 'This important and highly regarded resource provides the opportunity for students to have intimate contact with high quality artworks by significant Australian artists including Fred Williams, Grace Cossington-Smith, John Olsen, Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton and Leonard French.' The very first work acquired, Arthur Boyd's *Grampians landscape*, purchased by Courtis from Australian Galleries in December 1958, has been described as 'the outstanding work in the collection' and as its 'lynchpin'.

Works from the collection are actively used in the 'Art Slice' Program for students undertaking primary school teaching degrees at Bendigo.

One impediment to using the F.M. Collection more actively for research and teaching is difficulty of access: the exhibition catalogue is not published online.

The significant number of artworks on display in public areas throughout all levels of the Education Building (and to a lesser degree the Business Building) at Bendigo mean that the F.M. Courtis Collection has a strong presence and contributes significantly to the environment. This is consistent with the intentions of its founder.¹¹

¹⁰ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 106–108

¹¹ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 110–116

Trendall Collection

This collection was founded by A.D. Trendall when he bequeathed to the university his collection of 87 antiquities, a teaching collection, his research library and photographic archive, as well as the artworks, furniture and other contents of his apartment in Menzies College.

The core of the collection is Trendall's archive of approximately 40,000 photographs of southern Italian vases, and his extensive research library of books and journals. Among the antiquities, of particular importance are examples of the red-figure ceramics on which Professor Trendall was a world authority (Apulian red-figure fish plate; Paestan lebes gamikos; Attic lebes gamikos; Campanian squat lekythos; Sicilian alabastron; Sicilian Pagenstecher-lekythos; Apulian stemless cup; two Apulian lekaneis; Sicilian skyphoid-pyxis; two Campanian bail amphorae; Apulian bell krater; Apulian squat lekythos; Apulian kantharos; Chalcidic skyphos; plus numerous fragments).

Four ceramic items (an Apulian red-figure lekaneis with lid; a proto-Corinthian aryballos, an Athenian black-figure 'Siana' cup, and a fragment from an Attic red-figure amphora) were purchased by the Department of Art History (presumably on the advice of Trendall), when La Trobe began offering courses in Greek and Roman art in 1974. The first purchases were made possible by a grant from the Vice-Chancellor's Development Fund. An Anatolian horse figurine was donated in 1994 by Dietrich Borchardt (La Trobe University's first chief librarian).

The A.D. Trendall Teaching Collection comprises items of lesser significance (vessels, lids, fragments, figurines, lamps, bronzes, a relief and an *unguentarium*) of various origins, sizes, styles and condition. The majority (about 96 items) are thought to have been purchased by the Department of Art History.

There are also modern-era artworks that were owned by Trendall. Some depict archaeological subjects or sites, such as two Piranesi engravings; four works on paper (1830s–60s) by English artist and writer Edward Lear, depicting Mediterranean locations; a Lionel Lindsay engraving of a (mock classical) ruin in Agrigento; a watercolour by John Moore of Melito in Calabria; three etchings by Raymond Teague; two monotypes of Greek island locations by Sidney Nolan; a watercolour view of Orvieto by Leonard Annois; and a monotype of Pompeii by Thomas Gleghorn. The domestic furnishings and other contents, still in their original location – Trendall's apartment at Menzies College (itself designed by leading architect Robin Boyd) – constitute, in effect, a house museum.¹²

Much of the historical significance of the Trendall Collection lies in its provenance: its connection with its founder, Arthur Dale Trendall, one of the world's leading authorities on ancient Greek vase painting, one of the foremost classical art historians of his time, and Australia's first professor of archaeology. Trendall's significance as a scholar was acknowledged internationally well within his lifetime.

Another factor in the Trendall Collection's historical significance is its integrity, which in this case is related to its provenance. The Centre holds Trendall's photographic archive, library, antiquities, artworks, furniture and domestic chattels. Together they form an integrated whole that tells us of the life, work, interests, circle of friends and colleagues, and personality of a leading humanities scholar of the mid-20th century.

¹² Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 15–16

Another aspect of the collection's historical significance is the role that Trendall played in shaping the La Trobe University campus environment in its early years. Many people familiar with the campus attribute to Trendall's influence the naming of the central common area the 'Agora' after that of ancient Athens; the planting there of four plane trees (as the fifth-century BC statesman Kimon did in the Athenian Agora); the naming of the Peribolos to the north of the Agora; and the design (modelled after a Greek *theatron*) of the open-air theatre. These areas are essential to the La Trobe Bundoora campus experience: 'Students love the Agora'.

The 40 or so 'pots' in the Trendall Collection are not highly significant by international standards. Nor are they comparable to those held at the Universities of Melbourne, Sydney or Macquarie. Nevertheless, they are useful and interesting examples. They are far superior to those fragments designated as the 'teaching collection', being either intact or largely present and repaired. Some are too fragile to be handled as teaching material. All were acquired by Trendall, but he left no records of their provenance; they were probably gifts from other archaeologists.¹³

The significance of the Trendall Collection lies principally in its research and teaching potential. It has supported substantial research, publications and exhibitions, particularly on the subject of Greek vase-painting in southern Italy. Its founder created, and drew upon, the substantial photographic archive both before and during his time at La Trobe, when researching his numerous important publications.

Professor Trendall influenced a generation of scholars, one of the most eminent being his successor as director of the Trendall Centre, Dr Ian McPhee, also an international expert on Greek red-figure pottery who has drawn upon the collection for his research.

The collection is also used for undergraduate teaching; staff believe that hands-on, experiential learning is essential for archaeology studies; the presence of a 'teaching' collection of pot sherds and small objects makes this possible. Students respond very positively to handling fragments of items that date back thousands of years.

What makes the Trendall Collection truly unique and significant internationally is the photographic archive of some 40,000 photographs, mostly of south Italian vases. They are currently being digitised to form an online resource, in conjunction with Oxford University's Beazley Archive; scanning has been done by student interns and is nearly complete.

The Library at the Trendall Centre focuses on the ancient Mediterranean region, especially southern Italy and Sicily. Trendall bequeathed funds to enable the library to continue to develop, meaning that it is kept up to date and therefore continues to be highly useful for research, containing as it now does some 10,000 volumes plus numerous periodicals. It is La Trobe University's only specialist library, a 'superb research library' of national importance, which includes some very rare historical volumes, including 19th- and 20th-century museum catalogues, now difficult to obtain, as well as rare journals, and books not even held by the libraries at the university of Oxford, Cambridge or London. La Trobe students who use the collection for research tend to be at the third-year, honours, or postgraduate levels, rather than early undergraduates. Scholars from Britain and Italy have come to La Trobe to use the research collections.¹⁴

¹³ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 99–100

¹⁴ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 100–102

Ethnographic Collection

This collection of about 854 items focuses principally on Australian Aboriginal and Melanesian material culture, with a small number of African items (some of the latter of uncertain ownership status). The Australian communities represented include the Tiwi people of Bathurst and Melville Islands; west and east Arnhem Land including Elcho Island and Groote Eylandt; the Torres Strait; and individual items from Central Australia, possibly New South Wales, and Western Australia. From Papua New Guinea, the art of the Sepik River region is particularly well represented. To summarise:

- Artworks, and practical items of a highly decorative or artistic nature, include bark paintings, sculptures, dance wands and ceremonial boards, masks, totems, bone coffins/containers, pukumani (burial) poles, tapa cloths, story boards, some of the canoe prows and shields.
- Specifically ceremonial or symbolic items include a Morning Star pole, carvings, wands, dance boards and story boards, totemic carvings, bull-roarers, and model canoes.
- Practical tools include axes, stone hand-tools, hooks, pins, needles, scrapers, knives, blades, water containers, tongs, a broom, coolamons and other containers, spoons, bags and baskets, fire lighters, spatulas, digging tools, adzes, furniture, mats, headrests, shell money, message sticks, a weaving loom, betel-nut mortar, grinding stones, and a wooden chain.
- Personal items include ornaments and jewellery, clothing, hats, girdles, wigs, combs, smoking pipes, staffs and walking sticks, fans, and a mosquito whisk.
- Weapons and hunting equipment include swords, spears, arrows, blow-darts and pipes, daggers, clubs, fighting sticks, throwing sticks and boomerangs, woomeras, shields, body armour, fish traps, fish hooks, canoe prows and paddles, and a war horn.
- Musical instruments include numerous drums, a Jew's harp, a mouth bow, pan pipes, ceremonial flute, nose flute, other types of flutes, dijeridus, pairs of clap sticks, and a rattle.¹⁵

The Ethnographic Collection is of historical significance for its association with teaching programs at La Trobe, and because of the provenance of some groups of items. One of the principal donors was Mr James (Jim) Davidson and his wife Irene. The Davidsons lived near La Trobe University (at Ivanhoe) and in the early 1980s were persuaded by then lecturer in anthropology, Dr Ross Bowden, to donate a significant number of items from PNG and northern Australia to the university.

Further, Jim Davidson's links with PNG went back to the first foreign incursions into the remote regions in the 1930s, when he helped map the upper Fly River as an employee of Standard Oil. After World War II he grew coffee for 13 years near Mount Hagen and then returned to Melbourne, working as a dealer in Aboriginal and Oceanic cultural material. Davidson had a strong knowledge of the area, had known the legendary American anthropologist Margaret Mead, and donated items not only to La Trobe but also to the National Gallery of Victoria (from the 1960s onwards), and encouraged other major Australian and international museums to collect the work of particular Aboriginal artists.

The largest single donor to this collection was dealer James Davidson, who also made substantial donations to the National Gallery of Victoria. Of his gifts to La Trobe, the Australian bark paintings are considered particularly fine (such as David Milaybuma's *Namanwadi* [Crocodile] and others by

¹⁵ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 16–17

Gawirrin Gumana, Mithinari Gurruwiwi, Wandjuk Markia and Jimmy Njiminjuma), although it is likely that the NGV received those items of the highest artistic value. Davidson has been acknowledged as one of the first collectors to recognise the quality of Aboriginal art as fine art in its own right, not just as ethnographic information: 'Jim's significant legacy was the early recognition and appreciation of Aboriginal art, something we now all take for granted.' Joseph Brown always collected with a discerning artistic eye. The huge East Sepik dancing wagan mask he donated is a remarkable object of great visual power.

This collection was created for the purpose of teaching. Although it has fallen largely into disuse in recent years, there is scope to revive its use in various teaching areas, such as Australian and Pacific history; post-colonial studies; geography; and ethnography.¹⁶

Stewart Fraser Poster Collection

The Stewart E. Fraser Poster Collection comprises 3826 posters (among which are many duplicates). The majority are from China, USSR and Vietnam in the 1960s–80s. They are mostly political in nature, promoting views on issues such as civic duty, public health (including contraception), and community life and unity. There are also some Australian posters, relating mostly to student and local politics, Aboriginal land rights, and contraception/ family planning.

In assembling the political poster collection, Stewart Fraser aimed to include as many styles, techniques and topics as possible, although he did not claim that the collection aimed to be a comprehensive survey of Chinese poster art; rather it was the selection of one person. They range from the overtly political, such as 'Denounce the Gang of Four anti-party clique for plotting to seize party and state power' to depictions of Chinese landscape or wishes for a happy new year.

Professor Fraser also donated some unrelated items: about 15 early printed maps, a choral music manuscript on vellum (c. 1600), a grandfather clock made c. 1760, and a Russian icon c. 1802–15.¹⁷

The posters in this collection are historically significant for their representativeness, rather than their rarity. They are also significant as a reflection of La Trobe University's early and close engagement with the People's Republic of China.

The Stewart E. Fraser Collection is thought to be 'one of the largest and most important collections of Chinese propaganda posters outside of China'. As such it has great potential for use in teaching and research.

The collection's large size, and broad range of visual styles and subject matter, mean that it has the potential to support research in many areas of inquiry: Chinese history and politics; visual arts and graphic design; educational methods; propaganda studies; history of censorship. But several survey respondents pointed out that to take full advantage of opportunities to use the collections for teaching, the university must provide resources.

¹⁶ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 96–98

¹⁷ Preceding text extracted from full report, page 17

Relatively few people with whom I spoke were aware of the existence of the Stewart E. Fraser Collection. For this reason, its community significance is relatively low. One respondent characterised the Stewart E. Fraser Collection as ‘a real gem – undersold.’¹⁸

Etta Hirsch Collection

This collection of ceramics came to La Trobe University from Etta and Emmanuel ‘Manny’ Hirsh and family. Leading Australian studio ceramicists represented include Les Blakebrough, David and Hermia Boyd, Victor Greenaway, Harold Hughan, Col Levy, Milton Moon, Mirka Mora, Jenny Orchard, Gwyn Hanssen Pigott and Peter Rushforth. There is a smaller number of Japanese, European and American works. The collection comprises 238 catalogued pieces, although some of these are components of sets, and some items are yet to be catalogued. The dated works (many do not have dates recorded on the catalogue) span the period from 1955 to 2007. There are dinner services, large platters and bowls, bottles and various other types of containers, vases, coffee pots and teapots, goblets and cups, and a smaller number of sculptural pieces. Materials used are mostly stoneware, followed by earthenware and porcelain. A diversity of styles, techniques, and methods of firing and glazing is represented.

A number of paintings and works on paper by various artists donated by the Hirsh family, and works purchased with funds donated in memory of Etta Hirsh, are in the La Trobe University Art Collection.¹⁹

94 – 96 The significance of the Etta Hirsh Ceramics Collection is, firstly, of an **aesthetic/artistic** nature. It was formed by a collector who developed her eye for ceramics over many years, and who enjoyed living with the works in her home, seeing them every day and using many for eating or drinking. There are works by leading Australian studio potters including Les Blakebrough, Greg Daly, Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, Harold Hughan, Col Levy, Milton Moon and Peter Rushforth. Although the collection is not as large as the Margaret Lawrence Collection at the Victorian College of the Arts (some 2000 pieces, see Appendix I), it is arguably more coherent in style, focusing as it does on studio works from the second half of the 20th century.

The Etta Hirsh Ceramics Collection is of some **historical significance** due to its association with a discerning Melbourne collector, Mrs Etta Hirsh, who with her husband Emmanuel Hirsh was ‘central to the Australian art world for over five decades. They have not only been important collectors, they have also been great mentors, supporters and advocates of the visual arts throughout the period.’²¹ Also, the collection includes fine examples of works by studio potters who are important figures in the history of Australian ceramics.

La Trobe has another substantial holding of ceramics, donated by alumna Ms Anne Rutland, in 2008–09. Like the Hirsh Collection, Ms Rutland’s donation includes work by renowned Australian studio potters, such as Arthur Merric Boyd, Harold Hughan, Klytie Pate, Milton Moon, Charles Wilton and others, but it also has a quantity of pottery from commercial (mostly post-war) Australian manufacturers such as Bakewells, Bendigo Pottery, John Campbell Pty Ltd, MDK (Ellis Ceramics), and Premier Pottery (Remued Ware) which was located in Preston. And from about 1999 until 2008

¹⁸ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 105–107

¹⁹ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 14–15

La Trobe supported the Sidney Myer Fund International Ceramics Award at the Shepparton Gallery, acquisitions from which helped to develop La Trobe's ceramics collection.

The Hirsh Collection, especially when considered alongside the Anne Rutland donation of studio and commercial pottery, has potential to support **research and teaching** of both the history of 20th-century ceramics in Australia, and the making of ceramics more generally.

The combination of the Hirsh and Rutland gifts and other ceramics in the collection could also allow for research on the links and influences between studio and commercial pottery practices.²⁰

²⁰ Preceding text extracted from full report, pages 94–96

Recommendations²¹

This report is not a management plan for the collections. However, some actions will serve to preserve, or increase, the significance of the collections, and so the following recommendations are included. Some of these are endorsements of particular actions that were proposed in July 2016 in the *LTU Art Strategy*, while others have arisen from my consultations and research while preparing this report.

Location

It is recommended that the La Trobe University Art Collection, the Etta Hirsh Ceramics Collection, the Trendall Collection, the Ethnographic Collection and the Stewart E. Fraser Poster Collection remain primarily on the Bundoora campus, and that the university continue to display artworks in buildings throughout the campus.

It is recommended that the F.M. Curtis Collection remain primarily on the Bendigo (Flora Hill) campus, and that it continue to be displayed in suitable buildings on campus.

Display

The proposal in the *LTU Art Strategy* to ‘investigate the possibilities for a suitable location for an exhibition gallery at the Bundoora campus’ is endorsed. Reviving gallery exhibitions will help to preserve the collections’ community significance and exploit their potential for research and teaching. A permanent gallery space would also act as a hub for teaching, research and community involvement.

The proposal in the *LTU Art Strategy* to ‘develop a proposal for an outdoor sculpture trail (aligned with the Bundoora campus Masterplan)’¹ is endorsed. The trail was launched ten years ago as part of the university’s 40th anniversary celebrations. The 50th anniversary is a good opportunity to update the current publication,¹ particularly given some significant acquisitions in recent years.

Exchanges and loans of individual artworks between all of La Trobe’s campuses for the purposes of display should be encouraged.

Accessioning

Any works that have been accepted for the collection but not yet formally accessioned (for instance, remaining unaccessioned ceramics donated by Ms Anne Rutland and by the family of Etta Hirsh) should be numbered, catalogued, photographed and stored. Uncatalogued works may be vulnerable to loss or damage through poor location tracking and care, and cannot be found by catalogue users wishing to find items for research, teaching or display. Their significance is therefore at risk.

To help preserve the integrity of the Trendall Collection, original chattels in the apartment of Professor Dale Trendall, such as furniture, rugs and silverware, should be accessioned. These should remain in the apartment, preferably in their original locations within the apartment if this can be done while preserving their condition. However, items likely to suffer damage from regular use (e.g. chairs from

²¹ This section is extracted from full report, pages 134–136

sitting, rugs from walking), could be put aside to rooms or areas where they will not be regularly used. For special events and tours they could be put back into their original locations.

As mentioned in an earlier section of the report, it appears that La Trobe University holds other cultural material that is not part of any formal collection. It is possible that some of these items may be significant and should be managed by collection professionals, or could at least benefit from professional collection management advice. It is therefore recommended that the La Trobe Art Institute initiate an audit of all departments on all La Trobe campuses (initially by questionnaire) to identify and locate any such material, and then discuss with custodians the best way to proceed. It is possible that some items should be accessioned into the collection but remain in situ, such as the door painted by Mirka Mora located in the Chisholm College Art Centre.¹

It is recommended that the negatives of the photographs by Wolfgang Sievers of the Bundoora site and subsequent construction, commissioned by architects Yuncken Freeman in 1965, be accessioned into the La Trobe University Art Collection and stored in secure museum storage.

Collection care

The proposal in the *LTU Art Strategy* to 'resolve collection storage requirements'¹ is endorsed. On the Bundoora campus, renting additional space in the CAVAL store is recommended.

The proposal in the *LTU Art Strategy* to 'ensure that the storage care and conservation for the Ethnographic Collection is consistent and ongoing and that consideration is given to its access and display within the University's programs'¹ is endorsed.

For the F.M. Curtis Collection, implementing the recommendations of the report completed in 2016 by Dr Karen Annett-Thomas (see Appendix VI) would preserve and even increase the significance of the collection, through better conservation, documentation, display, interpretation, and use for teaching and research.¹ It is therefore recommended that Dr Annett-Thomas' recommendations be implemented (although resourcing and staff arrangements would presumably need to be reviewed in light of the advent of the LAI and the *LTU Art Strategy*).

Documentation

Complete information is important to preserving the historical significance of collections, and to taking full advantage of their teaching and research potential. It is recommended that the collection database be thoroughly reviewed and updated, with a view to accuracy and completeness, and made available online (subject to security considerations). A stocktake, as recommended in the *LTU Art Strategy*, will contribute to this task, although I recommend that works across campus be left on display, except for those needed for particular exhibitions or needing conservation attention.

Outcomes

This document will stand as a marker for the University's Collections in this, its 50th year. It is evident that the Collections are of patent significance, and as such have great intrinsic value to the University.

The La Trobe Art Institute will use this document to inform activities relating to the Collections, in consideration of the Recommendations put forward within the report.

The LAI undertakes to:

1. Communicate the final Significance Assessment report to the University community, relevant stakeholders and audiences;
2. Review the report's final Recommendations;
3. Endorse or dismiss each Recommendation as appropriate;
4. Develop strategies and timelines to undertake the delivery of endorsed Recommendations.

This report is not to be seen as a unique undertaking; as the Collections are an evolving entity the University has an obligation to consider this document as one that would be reviewed at appropriate intervals – recommended at no more than 10 years.

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