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# Macleay Museum News

Number 13, April 1999

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## *Adorned*



*Wogeo Youth wearing a hair ornament made from the trade plumes of a Victoria Crown pigeon, early 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

*Historic Photograph Collection, Macleay Museum*

A superb cowrie-shell bridal veil from the Middle Sepik region of Papua New Guinea, a vibrant beaded apron from Irian Jaya, whale-tooth necklaces from the Polynesian aristocracy, rare war charms from the Admiralty Islands, delicate pearl-shell earrings from Torres Strait are among the beautiful and dramatic objects featured in the Museum's new exhibition, ***Adorned: Jewellery and Body Decoration from Australia and the Pacific.***

The exhibition has been a collaboration between the Macleay Museum and the Oceanic Art Society (OAS). Artifacts from the Museum's Ethnography Collection, many of them collected in the 1870s and 1880s making them the earliest known examples of their kind, are complemented by a number of rare works contributed by private collectors from the OAS. Curator Anna Edmundson and OAS Exhibition Committee President Chris Boylan have spent the last six months sifting the Macleay collections as well as private collections throughout Australia and the Pacific selecting the rarest, most beautiful, and most historically significant items for a comprehensive showcase of Oceanic jewellery and adornment.

*Adorned* looks at the myriad ways there are to decorate the human body, bringing together a wide range of artifacts from the indigenous art traditions of Australia and the Pacific, highlighting the ongoing value of these items in complex systems of trade, social relations, aesthetics and identity.

Our outward appearance - the way we dress, the way we decorate our bodies - carries a range of 'messages' to the outside world about who we are. All human societies use clothing and body decoration for similar purposes: as protection from the elements, as a decorative device, as a way of displaying wealth and status, as a way of marking defined social identity and as a way of projecting our own image on to the world. Clothing, jewellery and body ornament transform the naked body into a cultural entity.

However, while the basic functions of dress and ornament are universal, styles of adornment and the meanings attributed to them differ between one society and another. The pieces in this show highlight diversity as well as unity - each piece reflecting a different cultural tradition and a different moment in time.

From the available natural resources of the region have sprung an almost infinite variety of decorative goods designed to beautify the body, to imbue power and protection, to mark age, gender and political status, and to exchange both locally and between far distant communities. Altogether these objects allow us insight into the lives and customs of the people who crafted them.

A large number of photographs from the Macleay Museum's Historic Photograph Collection are interspersed among the objects, enabling the audience to see how these objects were worn and appeared on the body in their original cultural context.

A generous grant from the University of Sydney Chancellor's Committee has enabled the production of an illustrated book to accompany the exhibition. The book will provide a permanent photographic record of much of the Pacific and Australian jewellery and dress held in the Macleay Museum and will be a significant resource for scholars, collectors and those who simply appreciate the beauty and artistry of these works. The book, also to be called *Adorned: Jewellery and Body Decoration from Australia and the Pacific*, is scheduled to be published in May. It will be available from the Museum and other outlets and will cost around \$40.

The exhibition was officially launched by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Gavin Brown at a well attended opening on Tuesday 23 March. Chris Boylan spoke on behalf of the Oceanic Art Society. *Adorned* will run until February 2000.

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## *Director's Notes and Jottings*

### **Staff Notes**

Since the last Newsletter there have been several staff changes. Louise Davies left to pursue other interests, and although we were very sorry to part, we were fortunate that Geoff Barker, who had been volunteering and working on the *Wanderlust* exhibition, was able to step

immediately into the position for six months. The position, Curator of the Historic Photograph Collection, will be formally advertised shortly. Anna Edmundson, who has been acting Curator of Ethnography since July 1997, was able to continue for an extra three months full time, to complete our new exhibition *Adorned*. Her contribution has been enormous in the short time she has been with us, and we will be sorry to say Goodbye. However we are really pleased to welcome back Susie Davies who has been working three days a week since the beginning of March. Andrea Brew left to go to the Heritage Office, and Marianne Czolij has joined the Museum as Administrative Assistant.

Our regular volunteers, Dr Val Havyatt (Scientific Instruments), Sarah Walters and Audrey Green (cataloguing our library), Dr Don Herbison Evans (now an Honorary Associate of the Museum, in Entomology), have been joined by Marina Garlick (Ethnography). Like most small museums we could not survive without the extraordinarily generous donation of skilled time from our volunteers.

Barbara Wittmann, a student of anthropology at the Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich, Germany, took an internship placement with the Museum for two months, mainly working with ethnographic photographs in the Historic Photograph Collection. Both she and we greatly enjoyed the experience.

The Macleay Miklouho-Maclay Centenary Fellowship for 1999 was advertised in January. Applications were received from several high quality candidates. The successful applicant will be announced shortly.

### **Valuations**

The University is obliged to value its collections and record values on the official accounts. For the latter part of 1998 all staff were heavily involved in both a stock take and valuation process of our various collections. This is a non trivial task, and again represents considerable work from all staff. We were fortunate in gaining the assistance of Todd Barlin (of Sotheby's) and Chris Boylan (Oceanic Art Society), both valuers for the Taxation Incentives for the Arts Scheme who valued the Ethnography Collection for a discount. Julian Holland, assisted by Val Havyatt, valued the Scientific Instrument Collection. Stuart Norrington (Vertebrates), Louise Davies and Geoff Barker (Historic Photograph Collection), and Margaret Humphrey (Invertebrates) worked with Simon Storey of Edward Rushton Australia to produce listings and valuations for those collections. Neil Boness, Rare Book Librarian in Fisher Library, valued the Museum's library, using data mainly supplied by our two volunteers. It was an interesting exercise, and at the very least served to assist in updating locations and records. The end result shows that the Macleay collections are easily the most valuable of the University's Museums.

### **Lighting**

New lighting was installed in the Gallery in early March, thanks to the extremely generous in-kind donation of lighting track systems from Sylvania Lighting International Pty Ltd and of a variable dimmer from Mr Mario Chirillo, of Q Engineering. Dr Warren Julian, Associate Professor in Architectural Science and Director of Lighting Studies, one of the leading lighting experts in the country, has been working with us, particularly with Stuart Norrington, for some time to design a new system for the Gallery, and it is through his good services that Sylvania Lighting have worked with us to produce a new lighting system. There is a central track running the length of the Gallery which contains uplights to reflect off the ceiling, as well as flexible spotlighting which can be directed as required. Two other tracks run the length of the Gallery down the side aisles, providing spotlighting for the showcase contents and other features like the bottled wet specimens at

each end of the Gallery. Within the next two months we will be replacing the showcase lighting in the display cases which line the sides of the Gallery.

Sylvania Lighting have sold the system to the Museum at half price - a considerable saving and extremely generous donation. Q Engineering have donated the dimmers. We have taken 'before' and 'after' shots, which will be published in various lighting journals. This has been a wonderful example of cooperation with and generosity to the Macleay by a leading lighting company, using University expertise.

### **Indigenous Heritage**

In February we were pleased to return to traditional owners some Ancestral Remains from Cummeragunja (near Echuca) in New South Wales, and four items of cultural significance from the Kimberley region in Western Australia. Mr Colin Walker, Elder and Sites Officer of the Yota Yota Local Aboriginal Land Council received the Remains in a small ceremony at the Macleay, and later the same day Mr Pat Dodson and Mr Peter Yu from the Kimberley Land Council accepted the sacred items, in an equally pleasant small ceremony of handover.

### **Merchandise**

Just a reminder that cards (\$2.50) and bookmarks (\$1) are still available from the Museum or from the Union and the Chancellor's Committee shop (at a higher price). Please remember them when you are replenishing your stocks of note cards. All proceeds go towards our special projects. We also have a new full-colour brochure, and if you know of possible outlets where we might make these available, please ring the Museum.

### **Heritage Committee**

The University's Heritage Committee is increasingly active this year, and the Museum is much involved. The State Heritage Act has been broadened to include movable cultural heritage, and all state organisations must comply by listing the heritage items of significance to the work, history and life of the institution. As you can imagine this will be a major task for the University. In addition, items of State Heritage Significance must be notified to the Heritage Office, and quite a few things like the furniture from the Macleay will be included on that Register.

### **Donations**

As ever, the Museum solicits your donations to assist us in presenting and promoting the Museum. This year we are hoping to raise funds to buy a cast of a bust of William Sharp Macleay to sit opposite that of William John Macleay. Donations are tax deductible, and should be sent direct to the Development Office with a note that the donation is intended for the Macleay Museum. We remain grateful for, but increasingly dependent on, the generosity of our friends and supporters.

### **Vanessa Mack**

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## *The Hogbin Collection*

*Barbara Wittmann, an anthropology student from Munich worked as a volunteer in the Museum during January and February. As her principal contribution she catalogued part of an extensive and important collection of ethnographic lantern slides. Before her return to Germany she prepared this account of the collection.*

I like photographing very much. So when I joined the Macleay Museum as a volunteer worker in January, I started my work in the Historic Photograph Collection. My mission was to catalogue some old lantern slides; 'boring job', I thought first until I realised - as a student of Anthropology - what this collection is about: an amazing variety of social anthropological observations of indigenous people of Australia and the South Pacific Islands in 1900 to 1940.

These lantern slides were collected over many years by Dr. Herbert Ian Hogbin, reader in Anthropology at the University of Sydney, as a teaching collection for his courses to illustrate different aspects of tribal life in indigenous societies.

Hogbin (1904-1989) started the collection with images he took during his several field trips in the 1930s, but completed it with slides from commercial photographers, books and fellow anthropologists.

As one of the first research students of the respected anthropologists Radcliffe Brown at the University of Sydney and Malinowski at the London School of Economics, Hogbin worked first in the Solomon Islands, on Ontong Java, Guadalcanal and Malaita. Later he did intensive research in northern New Guinea, particularly on the Islands of Wogeo and in Busama on the Huon Gulf. Often described as one of the finest ethnographers in Australia, Hogbin was well known for his perceptive and sensitive approach to his fieldwork. He recorded a compliment paid by one of the Solomon Islanders who remarked 'At last we have found a European who is a black man, even if his skin is white'.

Throughout his career he maintained a substantial interest in social and cultural change among tribal groups since European contact. This interest in the people themselves is reflected in Hogbin's images: using predominantly scenes of religious life, dancing, hunting and gathering, clothing and body decorations, he captures the every day life of the communities he studied.

*No. 696: Men returning from the hunt,  
N.E. Arnhem Land*



By contrast, commercial photographers modified the appearance of the subject to appeal the taste of European expectations: Aborigines with feathers in the hair, dressed in Kangaroo skins and 'artistic' body paintings

*No. 77: Man dressed for a corroboree, Queensland  
(studio photograph)*

Photography is a very valuable resource for anthropologists in the recording of ethnographic data. As a most careful observer with attention to detail and an acute sensitivity to significant issues in human relationships, Hogbin used photography as a teaching device to supplement

written documentation. This large collection of ethnological photographs deserves further, more detailed study.

Barbara Wittmann

## *Little Pictures*

This [portrait](#) is taken from a photograph of an engraving of a painting. The photograph is barely larger than the head of a pin.

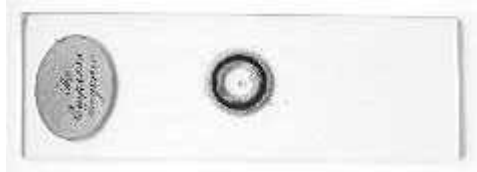
The introduction of photography in 1839 was soon followed by its application to microscopy. The microscope itself was undergoing rapid improvements at the time. The ability to photograph what was seen through a microscope greatly aided the transmission of scientific discoveries. The process was also inverted to produce [microphotographs](#) - very small photographic images to be viewed through the microscope.



The Manchester optical instrument maker, John Benjamin Dancer (1812-1887), was the first to produce microscopic photographs. He had experimented with producing photographs to be examined under the microscope soon after the daguerreotype process appeared in England. These were not successful. Scott Archer's wet collodion process enabled photographs to be produced on glass. Using this process Dancer made the first successful microphotographs in 1852. He subsequently supplied a wide selection of microphotographs commercially.

The growth of an amateur market for microscopes in the second half of the nineteenth century created an extensive demand for microphotographs and a very wide diversity of subjects was produced ranging from photographs of the Royal Family to reproductions of famous paintings. Passages of text such as the Lord's Prayer and banknotes were also popular.

The Macleay Museum holds nine microphotographs in its Scientific Instrument Collection. Four of these were produced by Dancer. The earliest, No. 14, shows a 'group of figures from life', apparently members of Dancer's family photographed about 1855. The other three are reproductions of famous or popular paintings and date from about 1870. A further five microphotographs represent the work of other makers.



Microphotographic slide (actual size)  
The photograph is the dot inside the ring

One of the most striking of the microphotographs is the portrait of the Empress Eugenie (1826-1920), wife of Napoleon III of France. Eugenie was painted several times by Franz Xaver Winterhalter who specialised in court portraiture. The 1854 portrait was subsequently engraved.

With the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War and the consequent end of the Second Empire in 1870, Eugenie fled to England where she remained for the rest of her long life. The microphotograph was probably produced in the early 1870s. Although there is no explicit statement of maker or retailer it is very much in the style of Edmund Wheeler. Certainly Wheeler's list of microphotographs in his 1876 catalogue included 'The Empress Eugenie'.

Microphotographs were initially regarded by some as having 'little or no practical utility'. They were merely a novelty 'somewhat childish and trivial'. During the siege of Paris by the Germans in 1870 (after Eugenie's hasty and secret flight to England) R.P.P. [Dagron](#) applied the technique to send messages to the city. A single pigeon could carry 50,000 messages. The recreational market for microphotographs faded out around 1900 but by then the value of miniaturisation of documents had been demonstrated. From the microdot popularised in spy novels to microfilm and microfiche, the miniaturised recording of words and images is today familiar to everyone.

Several microphotographic glass slides are on [display](#) in the Museum.

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