
Macleay Museum News

Number 15, April 2000

Carnivorous Solutions

Since its official introduction to western science in 1808, the thylacine has been the subject of ongoing scientific curiosity. In its functional similarity to the placental wolf, it is perhaps best known to students of biology the world over as a textbook example of the phenomenon of convergence, the evolutionary process whereby different species arrive at sometimes near identical solutions to similar problems, despite having very different starting points. More recently, the case has been advanced for convergence between one of the most spectacular of mammalian predators, the extinct sabre-toothed 'tiger' and the less well known but equally formidable marsupial super-predator, Australia's marsupial 'lion'.

In addition to thylacine material, the Macleay Museum holds an extensive collection of other mammalian carnivore species, both marsupial and placental. Among 'home-grown' marsupials, these range from mouse-sized species of *Antechinus* to the lower jaw of a marsupial 'lion', a species that may have exceeded 160 kg in weight. A wide variety of placental carnivores is also held in the Museum. Specimens include representatives of the cat, dog and bear families. Much of this material will be show-cased in a forthcoming display entitled *Carnivorous Solutions* to be installed at the Museum later this year. As well as highlighting the issue of convergence between placental and marsupial carnivores, this display aims to raise awareness of several key topics.



Dr Steve Wroe and a Tasmanian 'wolf' or thylacine (Thylacinus cynocephalus), logo of the Macleay Museum. The skeleton is one of several specimens collected for the Museum in the 1870s by George Masters.

The last known Tasmanian 'wolf' died in captivity in Hobart Zoo on 7 September 1936. Despite numerous 'sightings' over succeeding decades, no firm evidence for the existence of this, the largest marsupial carnivore to survive up to modern times, has been forthcoming since. The Tasmanian 'wolf' was formally declared to be extinct in 1986. Tragic in itself, the full scale of this loss has only become apparent over the last decade, as palaeontologists have unearthed fossils representing eight new species of thylacine previously unknown to science. Thus the Tasmanian 'wolf' was the last vestige of a once rich and diverse fauna.

By definition, carnivorous mammals eat at least some meat. But in many if not most carnivores, plants or insects comprise a surprisingly significant component of their diets. Indeed, for some so-called 'carnivores', such as most bears, vegetation is the primary, almost exclusive source of nutrition. At the other end of the spectrum, a number of species have evolved into 'hyper-carnivores', such as cats and the Tasmanian devil. With rare exceptions, diet in individual species, fossil or living, can be inferred from the shape of skulls and even teeth alone.

The display will also illustrate the evolutionary trends among groups of carnivores and will impress on the observer the cumulative, stepwise nature of the evolutionary process, whereby more generalised species evolve into more specialised forms under the influence of specific selective pressures. All specialised carnivores can be traced back to a generalised ancestor through structurally intermediate forms.

A particularly important aspect to be conveyed to the visitor will be awareness of the diversity of Australia's marsupial carnivore faunas from around 26 million years ago to the present day. Unfortunately, most Australians remain more familiar with exotic placental carnivores than our own native species. This display will focus heavily on native taxa, both living and extinct. Modern Australia is now home to the last two surviving members of a once great, intercontinental carnivorous marsupial radiation. Conservation of these animals, the Tasmanian devil and spotted-tailed quoll, will also be stressed.

Dr Stephen Wroe

Stephen Wroe was the sixth Macleay Miklouho-Maclay Centenary Fellow in 1999

Director's Notes and Jottings

Staff Notes

Anna Edmundson who was Curator of Ethnography in 1998 and part of 1999, during Susie Davies's maternity leave, is now at the Western Australian Museum as Curator of Ethnography with special responsibility for the non-Australian collections. As Anna's research interests are mainly in South-East Asia and Melanesia, this is clearly a wonderful opportunity and we all wish her well.

Since November the Museum has provided work experience for Matthew Alderdice, placed with the Museum by Mission Employment Services. Matthew, who is a very fine photographer, has worked mainly with Geoff Barker in the Historic Photograph Collection. In March, another International Intern Placement began when Heather Backman from Marist College in New York started work with Susie Davies and Rosemary Stack in Ethnography. Our regular volunteers—Val Havyatt on Tuesdays in Scientific Instruments, Don Herbison-Evans and Ken Fairey on Thursdays in Entomology, and Marina Garlick on Wednesdays in Ethnography—continue to contribute enormously to the work of the Museum.

Adorned : the Book

Our long-awaited book, *Adorned: traditional jewellery and body decoration from Australia and the Pacific* was launched in early November by the Chancellor Dame Leonie Kramer before an enthusiastic crowd. We are delighted to say that sales have been excellent and the reviews which have so far appeared, very positive. If you have not [ordered your copy](#), it is time to do so while we still have adequate numbers left. At Christmas, we also launched four new cards for sale, at \$10.00 a [set of four greeting cards](#), featuring butterflies from the Macleay collections. Again, they are very professional and very lovely, and may be ordered through the Museum. A similar image also featured on the front cover of the autumn guide to Continuing Education.

For several reasons, including taking advantage of publicity for the book, we decided to extend our main exhibition, *Adorned*, until January 2001. So far as we know this will be the only display with substantial Melanesian content during the Olympic period, and as this is a significant part of the art and culture of our region, it is important that it be represented. We remain most grateful to the Oceanic Art Society lenders for their generosity in continuing to do without their pieces for a further year. *Adorned* was featured among the Top Ten exhibitions in Sydney for 1999 in the Time Out section of the *Sun Herald* in late December 1999, up there with the Cezanne and the Drawing the Figure exhibitions at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Publicity

Without the stimulus of a new exhibition, publicity for the Museum in 2000 will be harder to achieve. Any assistance in this direction is always welcome. The Macleay Museum again had two articles in the December 1999 to May 2000 issue of *Antiques in New South Wales*. Julian Holland writes on aneroid barometers and Susie Davies on pearl-shell ornaments. Pick up a copy from your nearest antique dealer. Geoff Barker will have an article in the June issue on Federation photographs. We also feature prominently in the first issue of *The World of Antiques and Art* (which replaces *The Australian Antique Collector*). There is an article by Scott Carlin of Elizabeth Bay House on the Macleay furniture now on loan to Elizabeth Bay House, by Susie on William John Macleay as The Armchair Collector, and a review of the book. The number of images from our Historic Photograph Collection used in other publications continues to grow. Notable among these was the News Limited series, 'Sydney a celebration in pictures', and the latest film at the Imax theatre, *Sydney: A Story of a City*. Sales like

this are becoming an increasingly important source of funding for the Museum.

Loans

The Museum maintains its active loan program, and we are shortly to send nine important New Guinea artifacts to Marseille, for an exhibition on *The Art of Papua*. Because of the value of these objects, they will be couriered over to Marseille by Vanessa Mack in April and collected by Susie Davies on their return in September. Locally, we have recent or current loans of objects for display at the Powerhouse Museum, the National Maritime Museum, Elizabeth Bay House, Fisher Library Rare Books, the Australian Museum and the shortly to open Museum Victoria. Loans within the university community for research and display of course continue, with an increasing number of entomology loans now that Margaret Humphrey is managing that collection.

We continue to lend objects to the University of Canberra's conservation course, the objects coming back to us in much better condition than when they went down. With a diminishing budget, this is virtually the only way to get any conservation work on our collections.

Special Visitors

We have had many interesting overseas and interstate visitors to *Adorned* including Sir David Attenborough who arrived unannounced in the gallery late last year. He is a notable collector of Oceanic Art. We have had three special 'open occasions' since the last newsletter — the Wedgwood Society were given a private tour of the gallery on a Saturday afternoon in October, the Microscopical Society of Australia held its AGM in the gallery in December and then inspected the new display *Working with Microscopes*, and the Museum was opened in conjunction with the Chancellor's Committee's Antique Fest in February.

Indigenous Heritage Project

The University continues to be active in repatriating Ancestral Remains to the appropriate Aboriginal Community responsible for them. Such occasions are very moving, as the Elders who receive the Remains on behalf of their communities are so obviously moved by the solemnity and importance of the return. The University has gained considerably in the eyes of such communities through its pro-active policy in this matter. We have recently returned Remains to Bellinger River, NSW, and to Hinchinbrook, Queensland, and a secret/sacred artifact to Healesville in Victoria.

The general issue of repatriation is much in the museum news at the moment, with more argument over the return to Greece of the Elgin marbles from the British Museum. British museums have on the whole been reluctant participants in repatriation of cultural materials, and we were therefore doubly delighted to meet John Jackson from the Natural History Museum in London who was in Australia to collect information on repatriation programs to assist in the development of a policy on Repatriation of Human Remains from that Museum.

University Tours

The Macleay Museum has recently accepted responsibility for coordinating the University Tours program. This was previously run by a special section of the External Relations division, now restructured as Corporate Affairs, and there was no obvious home for this important function. The tours are mainly historical tours of the Quad buildings and the museums, and are given by a very loyal team of volunteers to a range of groups who request them, and to special visitors to Faculties. Marianne Czolij and Vanessa Mack are still coming to grips with all

that is involved, and finding it much more time consuming than expected. So far we are merely responding to requests, but later, we may try promoting and extending this valuable service. If any readers are interested in joining the volunteers, please let us know. Any income received from tours can be used by the Museum.

Donations

As ever, donations to the Museum or a contribution to the publishing and distribution of the Newsletter are more than ever needed. Funding from the University continues to fall, and of course, salaries and all other costs have risen.. Donations are tax deductible.

Vanessa Mack

Performance Art

In late November members of the public were invited to a rare viewing of a unique specimen. Only visible under special light conditions, this part-cycad, part-homosapien specimen was on display for only one hour.

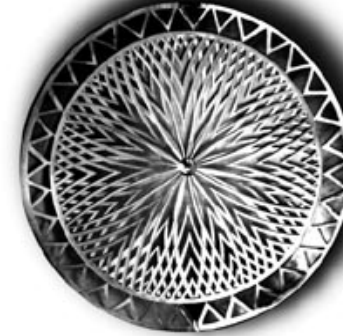
Inflorescent was the final performance of Barbara Campbell's residency program at the University's Centre for Performance Studies. Her whole body was inscribed with cycad-frond patterns and other decorative motifs in a special ink which only shows up in ultraviolet light. The light was concealed within a wiven palm-leaf fan.



As Barbara swept this across her body different parts of the decoration became visible. The performance provided a counterpoint to the exhibition *Adorned*. About 100 visitors viewed the performance, which was a great success.

Exhibitions

As a companion piece to *Adorned*, the Museum is currently displaying a small collection of work by contemporary jewellers who have been influenced by Pacific traditions. Niki Hastings-McFall adapts the traditional kapkap form using black-lipped pearl shell, which is widely available in the Pacific, and silver (instead of the traditional turtle shell) which acknowledges her European ancestry. Alan Preston's neck piece of pearl shell plaque on hand-woven sennet cord provides a modern interpretation of a traditional object. Alan Brown, Richard Tarrant and Zoja (formerly Jacqueline Beri) use natural themes or materials.



Silver kapkap by Niki Hastings-McFall, 1998

Pawa shell, greenstone, carnelian and shell are used in necklaces, earrings, combs and bracelets, while Zoja's 'Styx' necklace of copper and silver suggests branch coral or twigs. Sofia Tekela-Smith reflects the diversity of her identity through work such as a coconut-shell dress (coconut discs linked by gold-plated rings) and a breast piece of pearl shell, nylon thread and coconut sennet. All the stunning pieces in this display have been lent by private collectors.

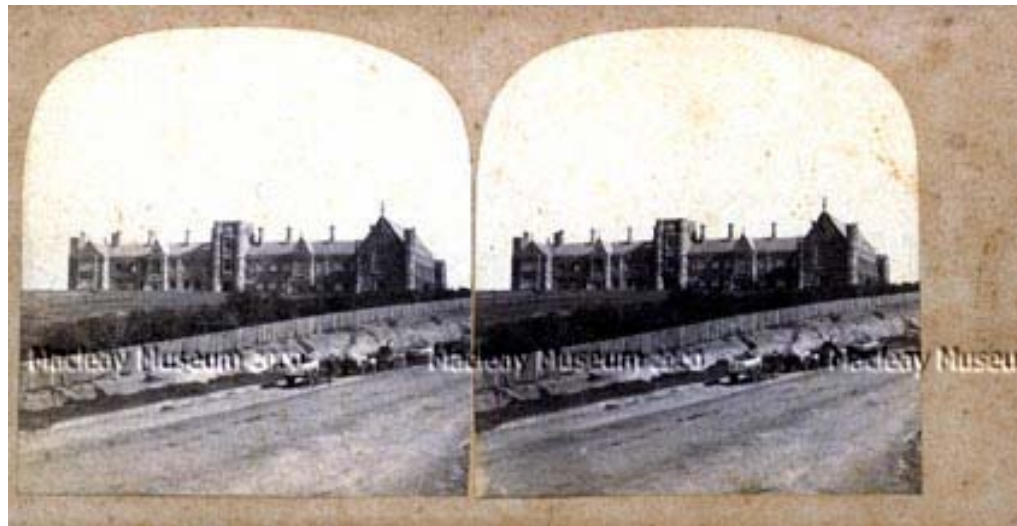
Plans are underway for a number of future displays. *Carnivorous Solutions*, described on the front page, will be installed shortly. Another display being developed, *Pinned, Bottled and Stuffed*, will express some of the exuberance for collecting natural history specimens. A third will replace the current display on preservation with one on a similar theme. At the same time, Margaret Humphrey in the Invertebrate Collection is coordinating ideas for a display on colour in nature using our insects and birds.

Additionally, work is well in train for the next major exhibition to open in March 2001. The working title, *Things of Spirit: Aboriginal art and artifacts from the Macleay Collections*, gives only a small idea of the stunning items you will see this time next year. Susie Davies and Rosemary Stack are jointly curating *Things of Spirit* which will be rich in objects of great rarity and beauty, many to be displayed for the first time. They are also preparing a book on the same theme, to showcase our Aboriginal collections. *Things of Spirit* will be the Museum's contribution to the Reconciliation Process for the anniversary of Federation as well as the University's sesquicentenary.

The Depth of History

The University of Sydney was established by an Act of the New South Wales Legislative Council in September 1850. Teaching began in

1852 in temporary quarters in College Street. A permanent site was selected beyond the south west extremity of Sydney at Grose Farm. Some felt this site was too remote - four miles from the centre of the city. The grand stonework of the eastern range of the main building on the ridge of Grose Farm, looking back towards the city, began to be erected in 1855. The building rising on the hill beside the road from Sydney to Parramatta was an impressive sight and soon attracted the interest of photographers. One of the early commercial photographers in Sydney was William Hetzer, especially known for his stereophotographs.



© Macleay Museum Historic Photograph Collection

On his arrival in Sydney in 1850 William Hetzer established a calotype photography studio. The 1850s were a time of expansion and money. The gold rush brought wealth to Sydney shopkeepers, craftsmen and artists, including photographers. Various institutions and societies developed in the 1850s which strengthened and focused the scientific community of the colony. The Philosophical Society was revived under Governor Darling who dabbled in scientific matters himself, and the need to process gold led to the establishment of the Sydney Royal Mint. In those days being a photographer meant being able to undertake all the chemical manipulations from preparation of the plate to development and printing. Professional scientists were especially attracted to photography as a recreation.

Daguerreotype and calotype photography were superseded by the wet-plate collodion process by the middle 1850s. A group of scientific amateur photographers developed in connection with William Hetzer. Several were on the staff of the Sydney Mint: the young assayer, William Stanley Jevons, later to become a leading economist in England, Robert Hunt, chief clerk in the bullion room, and Edward Wolstoneholme Ward, deputy-master of the mint and a captain in the Royal Engineers. Another member of the group was Professor John Smith. Smith was one of the three foundation professors of the new university, teaching chemistry and experimental philosophy. All of this

group were attracted by stereophotography and by the late 1850s stereoscopic cameras were available.

The principal of stereoscopy was discovered by the English scientist Charles Wheatstone in the early 1830s and published in 1838, a few months before the public announcement of practical photography by Louis Daguerre in France (daguerreotype) and Henry Fox Talbot in England (calotype). Wheatstone pioneered the electric telegraph in the 1830s and his name is recalled by the electrical device known as the Wheatstone bridge, which he did not invent! Photography made possible the production of pairs of images varying slightly in their viewpoints to produce a stereoscopic effect. Before that the effect was limited to simple geometrical drawings.

Stereoscopic photography was popularised at the Great Exhibition held in London in 1851. The sense of depth produced when viewing these images enchanted the public. Stereoscopic daguerreotypes were expensive to produce and are rare. With the introduction of the wet-plate process numerous prints could be made from a negative and by the late 1850s stereoscopic prints mounted on cards were being produced in huge numbers.

Sydney photographers took up the enthusiasm for stereophotography, especially William Hetzer and the amateur photographers associated with him. In September 1858 Hetzer invited subscribers to his proposed album of stereoscopic views of Sydney. There were to be three series of twelve images each, showing Sydney's 'harbour, principal buildings, streets, and neighbouring scenery, &c'. In the end the series amounted to sixty views.

Among these it is not surprising that we find one of the new university building. To see this stereoscopically a viewer is not necessary. Hold the page a comfortable distance in front of you and focus your eyes at about twice that distance. You will start to see a third image in the middle. Concentrate on this until a clear stereoscopic view forms. This image is one of an extensive array of stereo images held in the Museum's Historic Photograph Collection.

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334,016 Visitors
since January 12, 2000