

Special collectors with a Special Library

The National Gallery of Australia's Research Library (NGARL) can be defined as a special library, as it is client focused. This is evident in the comprehensive reference service and accessibility to information relating to the visual arts and all aspects of museum operations. Information is obtained, organised, and provided in the form of rare books, catalogues raisonnés, monographs, exhibition catalogues, serials, audiovisual materials, documentation files (ephemera, art and artist files), and archival collections. We offer online research resources and databases, and are currently compiling finding aids for our archives and web archiving through Pandora.

My role within the Research Library is as a project archivist in the Archives and Special Collections section. The Archives and Special Collections section contains a veritable treasure trove of material culture that is part of one of the strongest collections of visual art research material in Australia. The rehousing and intellectual description of the collection follows the gallery's objective to encourage, facilitate, and acknowledge gifts and donations that enhance the national collection. In continuation of this objective, the Research Library's aim to collect archives that develop and enhance the National Gallery's art collection is fulfilled by offering this unique research resource.

I do not have librarian qualifications or a visual art background. Despite this my archaeological studies have put me in good stead. I liken archive collections to archaeological sites where you need a broad set of skills to scrape away the surface to describe the material culture, understand the context, and to offer appropriate, intellectual description that is unbiased. The focus of the Archive Collection is Australian

artists and organisations and, as is characteristic with all archives, there is a range of material including letters, diaries, handwritten notes to textile swatches, printing proofs, and undeveloped film. Presently, I am working on archival collections that are part of the Australian Print and Printmaking Archive, a collaborative effort between Roger Butler, Senior Curator of Australian Prints, Drawings and Illustrated Books, and the Research Library.

The Print Council of Australia (PCA) was and still functions as a non-governmental organisation involved in the visual arts with broad activities

and influence. Their collection records the beginnings of an organisation that was dedicated to raising the profile of printmaking in Australia, lifting it beyond a perceived 'craft' to a serious art form. The collection includes mainly correspondence, exhibition details, printmakers, gallery/art centres, colleges/universities, entry forms, receipts, and copies of newspaper clippings. They provide a comprehensive history of the administrative processes of the PCA and its exhibitions.

The Print Council of Australia organised exhibitions at local, regional, national, and international levels establishing relationships between galleries and their directors. Their

spin-off journal *Imprint* is considered an important resource to the visual arts. There are also more personal records in this collection. In some instances I am allowed intimate snap shots into an artist's life through their letters, notes, and biographies that show their relationship with their art, colleagues, friends, and family. From Franz Kempf's bemoaning his time management, to Arthur Wick's 'present' focus on "...observed events (as facts) that can be organised and systemised".

Another collection of papers within the Printmaking Archive are from Studio One, which functioned as a print editing workshop in Canberra. There are 'print job cards' and letters to artists and galleries. Some more notable artists and organisations include George Gittoes, Dennis Nona, Treahna Hamm, the Indulkana Aboriginal Community in South Australia, and Manupi Art Centre in the Tiwi Islands. The latter has been recorded extensively with photographs. This collection lacks the depth and warmth of the PCA collection, as is evident in the demise of the organisation that was, towards the end, beset with budgeting issues and staff discontent.

These archival collections offer an insight into the context and growth of art organisations and show the emergence of printmaking as a significant visual art form in Australia. They are a valuable part of the Research Library's holdings and, combined with other material in the library such as the Art and Artist Files, make a powerful research tool. I feel privileged to work for the National Gallery of Australia and to contribute to the support and enhancement of the visual arts in Australia.

Peta Jane Jones

Project Archivist

peta.jones@nga.gov.au



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National Advisory Congress Meeting



All ALIA members are invited to join us at a local National Advisory Congress meeting. This informal meeting will provide an opportunity for you to participate in discussion with an ALIA Director and your Local Liaison Officer on the 2010 NAC focus "volunteering with ALIA"

<http://www.alia.org.au/governance/nac/2010/>