Exhibiting Indigenous Australian collections in the UK

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Abstract

This thesis asks: what are the uses and meanings of Indigenous Australian collections in the UK today? This question is approached through a comprehensive analysis of one exhibition, *Indigenous Australia: enduring civilisation*, which took place at the British Museum (BM), London, from 23 April to 2 August, 2015. Each chapter considers a different stage of the exhibition's development and reception. It begins in *Chapter 2. Genealogy* with a study of how the exhibition emerged from the longer history of collecting and displaying Indigenous Australian material at the BM. It then interrogates the aims and experiences of the people who made Indigenous Australia in *Chapter 3. Production*. *Chapter 4. Text* analyses the finished display and, *Chapter 5. Consumption*, evaluates how the exhibition was received by its audiences. Each chapter considers not only how the exhibition was experienced by the people involved, but also how their aims and understandings relate to broader debates about the role of colonial era collections in contemporary Western societies.

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Preface

> I only know my law in my country, I can't trespass on somebody else's land because they have their own totems as well as their own language and culture. This is the way Aboriginal people interpret their land through art.
>
> Joe Neparrŋa Gumbula (Gumbula 2010: 9)

Interpreting the material of another culture is, as Joe Gumbula asserted, fraught with difficulties. As a Yolngu researcher and Elder from North East Arnhem Land, Australia he could not interpret the paintings (and therefore the law) of another country, not only because he did not have the ownership or intellectual rights to that law, but also because he did not have the 'language and culture' to do so. Gumbula recognised that one cultural system is not adequate to understand the art-work of a different system. Furthermore, interpreting someone else's cultural forms is a kind of 'trespass[ing]' or appropriation, which is an implicit evocation of colonial acts of invasion. For these reasons the issue of how to translate or contextualise Indigenous Australian objects in exhibitions for a non-Indigenous audience is the subject of much debate. By extension, a piece of research on an exhibition of Indigenous Australian material, the premise of this thesis, is also problematic.

Yet forms of translation across cultures are necessary and have always been so. Interpretation promotes understanding and collaboration between a wide range of peoples. This was something that Gumbula was aware of. One of the most compelling features of his broad body of work on Yolngu music, painting and museum collections is his adept use of metaphors which are widely understood in Australian and European cultures to explain Yolngu philosophies to others. In this context Gumbula's statement provides two concepts which I follow in this thesis. The first is to be reflexive, or in other words, to be aware of your own position in any act of interpretation. I outline my background and interests in this preface. The second is that a researcher is best placed to interpret their own cultural forms. For this reason this thesis is not an interrogation of Indigenous Australian groups' and individuals' understandings of the exhibition. While these are considered as part of the wider study, I have tried, as much as possible to let the people mentioned explain their position in their own words. I consider this thesis instead as my act of interpretation of the exhibition, as a specific event, and a wider cultural form which I have been involved in and have some degree of knowledge about.

My involvement in the exhibition that forms the focus of this thesis came about, mid-way through my PhD studies at the University of East Anglia (UEA). After working in a number of museums and doing a Museum Studies MA programme there, I started a PhD on contemporary Indigenous Australian art in UK museums. I chose the topic because of an interest in Australian art, gained from spending a number of years studying and working in the country. I had also heard about an upcoming exhibition on Indigenous Australian material at the British Museum (BM), London. There were a number of artists in residence as part of the exhibition process and I thought that this would be a good case study. A year into the PhD, I was in Australia conducting interviews with artists when I saw a job advert for Project Curator on the exhibition at the BM. I applied and was appointed, which implied an intercalation from my PhD studies, i.e. stopping my research in order to work on the exhibition that was to become *Indigenous Australia: enduring civilisation* (23 April-2 August 2015). When I returned to my research eighteen months later it was clear that the exhibition had to be not just *a* case study, but *the* case study for the thesis. With the consent of BM staff, I moved my focus to *Indigenous Australia*. Because the focus of my thesis changed, I used little of the early research in this study. The exception to this is the archival and historical research which I conducted in Australia and Britain, and a few interviews with artists who were later involved in *Indigenous Australia.*

My role in the exhibition posed one particular challenge for this study. I had not been employed at the BM to work on my PhD and I did not undertake any research during this time. For this reason, as outlined in the *Introduction*, I have only used publically available materials from this period (with exceptions explained below). It is, however, inevitable that my knowledge of *Indigenous Australia* has been greatly informed by the insights and knowledge I gained from working on the project. One major exception to this use of evidence in the public domain is in the use of audience data and surveys, for which I requested special permission from the BM interpretation department after the exhibition had taken place. My analysis of the data commenced after I finished working on the exhibition.

In order to obtain a degree of distance as I have written about the exhibition in the third person. I cannot pretend, however, that I was not invested in the *Indigenous Australia's* outcomes and reception, nor that I am not grateful to have been involved in the project. It was a remarkable experience.

1. Introduction

> I think the challenge for museums often is that their legacy comes from the 18th or 19th centuries but, given you have these materials, what is their role today?
>
> Gaye Sculthorpe, lead curator, speaking at the press launch for *Indigenous Australia: enduring civilisation*, British Museum, London (Sculthorpe, quoted in Bunbury 2015).

> If you look at western European civilisation they are all societies where very high levels of culture have been accompanied by astounding levels of brutality… The great thing a museum can do is allow us to look at the world as if through other eyes.
>
> Neil MacGregor, former director of the British Museum, speaking after his appointment as head of the founding directorate of the Humboldt Forum, Berlin (MacGregor, quoted in Adams 2016).

Britain's colonial past poses one of the most complex problems that British museums face today.[1] This is not only because museums are places where history is researched and displayed, but also because the imperial era is an inescapable part of many Western museums' collections and structures. Many objects in these institutions were acquired from colonised countries or from those subject to wider forces of Euro-American imperialism. Furthermore, a large number of museums, particularly publicly owned regional and national institutions, were founded and built during the height of Britain's colonial ambition. As the statements above from two prominent museum professionals illustrate, these histories are now recognised and museums are expected to address them. This is particularly evident in the statement by Gaye Sculthorpe, the lead curator on *Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation* (hereafter *Indigenous Australia*), which ran at the British Museum (BM), London from 23 April to 2 August 2015.[2] Even though she did not explicitly reference imperial histories, the comment needed no further explanation for the journalists present at the press conference, demonstrating that this mandate

[1] I use the term museum in the broad sense as it is used in the field of 'museum studies' to refer to all types of museum, including art galleries. I use the term colonial and colonised to refer to regions which were invaded and settled by European nations during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I use the term colonial to refer to this time period (e.g. colonial era Britain). I use the term imperialism to refer to European and American states' broader acts of power and control over other regions (military and economic), of which colonisation was a part.

[2] *Indigenous Australia* was the shortened title used by the BM and, with a few exceptions, by journalists and other commentators.

is deeply embedded in the contemporary dialogue around British museums. No one needed to clarify that the challenge she was talking about was the imperial legacy.

How to address this challenge remained an open topic. Sculthorpe framed the problem as a rhetorical question for all museums– 'what is [these collections'] role today?' (Bunbury 2015). The statement was made, however, during a press conference about a particular exhibition, *Indigenous Australia*. *Indigenous Australia* was comprised of collections made since the earliest days of British colonial involvement in Australia and took place at an institution that was founded during the colonial era (1753). In this context Sculthorpe's statement also, therefore, suggests that the exhibition was one form of response to her question. In other words, *Indigenous Australia* and the activities surrounding it, provide one example of the meanings and functions of a colonial era collection. This thesis takes this concept as its starting point, interrogating *Indigenous Australia* in order to ask: what are the uses and meanings of Indigenous Australian collections in the United Kingdom (UK) today? In doing so it provides the opportunity for wider reflection on the role of colonial era museum collections in nations with colonial pasts.

Background

Indigenous Australia was the first major exhibition of Indigenous Australian material in the UK since *Aratjara: the art of the First Australians*, a touring exhibition from Hamburg, opened at the Hayward Gallery in 1994 (see *Appendix 1: List of Indigenous Australian Exhibitions in the UK*, for full details). Headed by Sculthorpe, who is of Tasmanian Aboriginal descent, it was also the first major exhibition in the UK to be led by an Indigenous Australian curator. As such it was a widely anticipated and debated exhibition in the museum world, as well as in Indigenous Australian communities and in the wider media in Australia (Clark 2015; Corporation 2015; Daly 2015; Gorrey 2015; Jury 2015). The exhibition was run in collaboration with the National Museum of Australia (NMA) and the Australian National University (ANU), both in Canberra. These two organisations helped facilitate a large scale programme of community engagement, which involved twenty-seven communities and many more individuals. This was collaboration on an unprecedented scale for a UK exhibition of Oceanic material. The exhibition as a whole process involved British and Australian museum professionals and academics (Indigenous and non-Indigenous); Indigenous Australian

community consultants; Indigenous Australian artists; and international audiences in London and online. All of these factors made it a particularly interesting and valuable case study – the large number of people involved and their high level of interest in the project allowed for an interrogation of a broad range of perspectives and experiences.

I am interested primarily in establishing the understandings of the people involved in the exhibition. I do not define the words 'uses' and 'meanings' in the central question (What are the uses and meanings of Indigenous Australian collections in the UK today?) because I am interested in establishing how participants conceived the exhibition and its purpose. In this respect the central question could be reconfigured as: what were the aims and experiences of the people who engaged with *Indigenous Australia*? This question is considered in a model which divides the exhibition process into three broad stages 'production, text, consumption' (Macdonald 2002: 16). This follows Sharon Macdonald, who uses the model in her ethnography of an exhibition at the Science Museum (SM), London (Macdonald 2002: 16). I have chosen this model, because, as Macdonald explains, it is one which closely mirrors the exhibition process as it is understood by those involved, as a progression of stages across time, with a clear break at the point that the exhibition opens (Macdonald 2002: 16-17). I have added one stage to this model, which considers the history of the collection before the exhibition. In using this model the structure of this thesis therefore follows the experience and conception of the participants.

Each chapter of the thesis covers one of these broad stages: *Chapter 2. Genealogy*, considers the history of the BM Indigenous Australian collection and the role that this played in the final display; *Chapter 3. Production*, covers the development stages of *Indigenous Australia*, including the research and consultation processes and decisions over narrative and content. *Chapter 4. Text*, describes and analyses the finished exhibition in a critical reading. *Chapter 5. Consumption* complements the theoretical analysis of *Chapter 4*. by proving an applied study of audience response onsite and online.

The discussion below establishes the critical parameters of my research, it is worth, however considering some definitions briefly here. The term 'Indigenous Australia' refers to two groups of indigenous peoples in Australia. Aboriginal peoples from mainland Australia and some surrounding islands (including Tasmania), and Torres Strait Islander peoples from the Torres Strait Islands, located between the tip of Cape York Peninsular in Australia and the southern

region of Papua New Guinea (figs. 1, 2,3). At the time of the British invasion of Australia there were about 250 distinct languages spoken in Australia (McConvell and Thieberger 2005: 79). Each language group had their own territories, histories and cultural forms. Figure 1, a map from *Indigenous Australia* illustrates the rough locations of many of these language groups.[3] The terms 'Indigenous Australian', 'Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait Islander', suggest therefore, a homogeneity that does not exist. Furthermore, the concept of a homogenous Indigenous Australian group was one that was used by British and Australian Governments to deny people's relationships, and political claims, to their homelands (Fisher 2016). These three terms have also, however, been used by Indigenous Australian peoples to further political aims and as an expression of solidarity in respect to shared (colonial) traumas and struggles for rights. They are also commonly used by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians as recognition of historic and contemporary relationships (cultural, political and social) between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups. Where I use these terms in this thesis I do so in this way, and in doing so also follow the usage in the exhibition itself. The term 'indigenous', with a lower case 'i' is used to refer to indigenous peoples in a global context. When the 'I' is capitalised it refers to a particular group (as in Indigenous Australians).

I use the word object to refer to objects in museum collections, including materials that may in other contexts be referred to art, artefacts. Conceptually, however, I follow the theory that objects are relational and that their meanings are socially constructed (Bell and Geismar 2009; Buchili 2002; Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007; Miller 1987). I recognise that others use the term 'things' in order to deemphasise the separation between culture and (in particular) museum objects and art objects (Bell and Geismar 2009; Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007). Karen Jacobs writes, however, that 'a focus on materiality should not imply an opposition between the 'material' and the 'cultural' and it is possible to use terms such as 'object' and 'art', particularly if the cultural constructions of these terms are recognised (Jacobs 2011: 35). I use the term object in this way. The primary basis for my use of the term is that it was the one which was most commonly used in the BM and the other museums which I came into contact with. Similarly, following the usage of certain participants (particularly artists) I also sometimes refer to some objects as artworks, particularly when discussing these participants' opinions. This does not mean, however, that I make any conceptual distinction between the two, and also refer to these particular things as objects. Where I refer to specific objects I provide the details

[3] This should not be considered, however, as a representation of definitive boundaries. In a review of these maps and their history Bill Arthur and Francis Morphy explain that 'groups are not so rigidly bounded' and 'hazy boundaries' would be a better representation of the situation (Arthur and Morphy 2005: 13)

of makers, origins etc. and how to locate this object (for example via accession number and institution) in text. The exception to this is for the objects that were on display in *Indigenous Australia*. In order to avoid repeating information, or forcing the reader to scan back through the text, I provide a list of all of the objects in the exhibition in *Appendix 2: Object List* and have given each object a short reference number, which the reader can use to look up these details. These entries appear in brackets next to the object being discussed, for example '(object ref. 1)'.

It is also necessary to consider how to describe the participants in this study. Michael Baxandall identifies three actors in the exhibition process: the maker, the exhibitor and the viewer (Baxandall 1991). Baxandall's work is useful as a way to conceptualise the roles of all of the actors in the exhibition process. It is also, however, problematic in its emphasis on the cultural background of the participant. In Baxandall's description the implication is that the exhibitor is always a non-indigenous curator who translates the work of the indigenous maker for a non-indigenous audience (Baxandall 1991). In the context of contemporary museums this cultural emphasis does not work - makers and the descendants of makers are, today, often also exhibitors and viewers. An example would be an exhibition which was curated by someone from the source community for an audience which included community members. This was the case for *Indigenous Australia*. For this reason, I alter Baxandall's concept to define the actors in *Indigenous Australia* through four broad categories based not on their cultural origins, but on their role in the exhibition process: exhibitors, community consultants, artists, and audiences. It is important, however, to recognise the distinct backgrounds, roles, understandings and experiences of Indigenous Australian participants in the exhibition. I do this simply by acknowledging participants' ties and connections to communities and place as they describe them.

This thesis contributes to two broad dialogues which are present in academic and professional discussions on museums. The first is on the roles and functions of museums with imperial pasts. This includes the problem of how to care for and display certain collections of non-Western objects (largely those from groups Africa, Oceania and the Americas) that are often still termed ethnographic collections. The second dialogue is how to conceptualise and study museum exhibitions involving non-Western material. These two dialogues provide an academic background to this thesis. They also provide the background to *Indigenous Australia* itself, as these debates have informed aims and practices within museums in the past and continue to do

so. I consider these two dialogues, and the influence they have had on the care and display of Indigenous Australian museum collections, below. Through this analysis I also establish a methodology for this thesis. I firstly cover the changing roles of museums with imperial pasts in *Museums, Ideologies and Imperialism*, before considering how to analyse and conceptualise the exhibition in *Critical Approach*.

Museums, Ideologies and Imperialism

The academic discussion of Western museums and their role in Europe's imperial activities emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as part of a wider trend towards a more critical interrogation of museums' functions known as the new museology (for early examples of this critical trend see Duncan and Wallach 1978, 1980; Lumley 1988; Stocking 1985b; Vergo 1989b; Weil 1983). Peter Vergo identified this emerging trend in an edited volume, titled *The New Museology* (Vergo 1989a). He explained it as a new 'theoretical or humanistic discipline' as opposed to the 'old' museology which focused on practical methods of museology, such as display techniques, collections management and conservation (Vergo 1989a: 3). Looking back at the trend and how it shaped the contemporary museum studies Macdonald provides a more specific definition, identifying three main features of the new museology (Macdonald 2006: 2-3). The first is an interest in the 'contextual, rather than inherent' meanings of museum objects (Macdonald 2006: 2-3). The second is centred on siting museums within contexts and concerns of capitalism, for example as a tourist attraction and source of revenue (Macdonald 2006: 2-3). The third is an interest in audiences, especially in terms of how they experience the museum (Macdonald 2006: 2-3). Macdonald describes this area of the discipline in terms of interest in visitors, but it can also incorporate wider theoretical debates on the interaction of museums with society (Macdonald 2006: 2-3). Macdonald summarises the new museology as a 'shift to seeing the museum and the meaning of its contents not as fixed and bounded, but as contextual and contingent' (Macdonald 2006: 3).

There was also another feature of the early stages of the new museology (c.1970-1995) that had a significant impact - that it incorporates a perceptible level of criticism of the museum practices of the later 20th century (and now the 21st century). Many texts involved some amount of critiquing and problematising ongoing practices and understandings (see Clifford 1988; Duncan and Wallach 1978; Hiller 1991; Karp, Kreamer, and Lavine 1992; Karp and Lavine 1991;

Lumley 1988; MacCannell 1990; Vergo 1989b). For example, in the first chapter of *The New Museology* Charles Saumarez Smith challenges the assumed 'superior authority' of the museum (through curators) to interpret objects (Saumarez Smith 1989: 9). Commentators also raised concerns with museums' attitudes towards visitors, for example Eileen Hooper-Greenhill argued that museums had focused on visitor numbers, at the expense of visitor experience and learning (Hooper-Greenhill 1988). This element of critique of past practices is important, because the new museology was not only a new direction in academic discussions on museums, it was also part of dramatic changes within these institutions, influencing their aims and practices. The new museology was not just an academic trend, it was a force of practical change.

One of the concepts that became particularly influential during the new museology was the idea that museums are social and political agents. The concept centres on the way museum buildings and objects act on their visitors. Tony Bennett has argued that museums influence visitors not only by providing information in displays, but also by regulating behaviour through their architecture and decoration (Bennett 1995, 1996, 2005). Drawing on Michel Foucault's discussions of architectures of government control (particularly Foucault 1972, 1977), Bennett argues that visitors' movements through a museum can be dictated in order to construct a state's ideals of citizenship (Bennett 1995, 1996, 2005). Carol Duncan provides a case study illuminating this concept in her discussion of how two national museums, the Louvre Museum (LM), Paris (opened in 1793) and the National Gallery (NG), London (opened in 1838) were constructed to promote certain political ideologies (Duncan 1995). She illustrates this in an analysis of the early displays of the Louvre Museum (LM), Paris (opened in 1793) and the National Gallery (NG), London (opened in 1838) (Duncan 1995: 21-47). Both galleries were, she argues, laid out in order to instil a sense of unique national identity (French and British) (Duncan 1995: 21-47). This identity was built in opposition to societies outside of the nation. In the case of the LM, for example, objects were arranged by culture. The rooms were ordered so that the visitor was required to process through a hierarchy of cultures, beginning with Ancient Egypt and Ancient Greece, and ending with the French nation at the pinnacle. The effect was, Duncan argues, particularly powerful because of the ritualised form it took – the act of processing through the rooms meant that the visitor physically moved from a place of inferior to superior status. As the LM was one of the models for many subsequent public galleries Duncan argues that many public museums are still broadly based on this model leading visitors through 'the course of western [sic] civilisation' (Duncan 1995: 33).

While they may have inherited certain forms of organisation from the nineteenth-century, Western museums do not deliberately engage in such overt projects of nation building or control today. Some commentators have, however, argued that museums in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries still engage in forms of ideology production, albeit ones that may be less deliberate, or less coherent. For example, Duncan and Alan Wallach argue that the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), New York (opened in 1939), promotes 'individualism, understood as subjective freedom' and is therefore, an 'artistic translation' of the 'ideology of late capitalism' (Duncan and Wallach 1978: 30). In *The Predicament of Culture*, his critique of Western encounters with non-Western cultures in the twentieth-century, James Clifford argued that these ideologies need to be examined, writing, 'it is important to analyse how powerful discriminations made at particular moments constitute the general system of objects within which valued artefacts circulate and make sense' (Clifford 1988: 220-21). Clifford's work in this volume did just that, interrogating the seemingly 'obvious' meanings and constructions of non-Western collections at the end of the twentieth-century (including museum display of these collections) to reveal embedded prejudices and power structures which often worked against the peoples whose cultures were on display (Clifford 1988).

Others have considered the ideological role of national museums, with large global collections, more broadly. These museums, of which the BM is one, are often referred to as 'universal museums' or 'universal survey museums' ('Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums' 2003; Cuno 2006; Duncan and Wallach 1980; Kaplan 2016). Some argue that these institutions can still promote the superiority of the nation they are located in (Coombes and Phillips 2015; Duncan and Wallach 1980; Kaplan 2016), while others argue that universal museums hold the material for a global audience in order to foster inter-cultural relationships ("Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums" 2003; Cuno 2006; MacGregor 2004), or that the problem of who owns particular objects, and the legality, and morality of this ownership, is a complex and nuanced one, particularly as these definitions have changed over time (Abungu 2004; Appiah 2006).[4]

The links between museums and social and political projects of the past is one reason why those working in museums today consider it necessary to address the histories of their collections and institutions. As attitudes have changed and it is no longer considered appropriate, for example, to aggrandise a particular cultural group and diminish others, museums have felt the need to

[4] Appiah also makes the case for retaining universal museums, but argues that they should be located globally, rather than only in Western centres of power (Appiah 2006).

overtly distance themselves from past practices. This is one of the contexts for *Indigenous Australia*. This discussion also provides a reminder that the concept of addressing, or redressing, the colonial past in museums is an ideology in itself. By considering what this concept means to those involved in *Indigenous Australia* and how it operates in practice in the exhibition, this thesis therefore contributes to the wider interrogation of museum ideologies in the twenty-first century.

The broad ideological roles of museums are one part of the background to the 'challenge' of colonial era collections that Sculthorpe describes at the beginning of this chapter. Another part is the specific issues emanating from the eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century histories of the objects in the collection and their links to broader colonial histories. The meaning of this challenge is best understood by a review of recent debates about colonial era material in museum collections. Following the structure of these debates I have broken this challenge into three parts: addressing the historic origins of collections; addressing the historic use and display of objects in museums; and the need to engage source communities. I discuss these three aspects of the challenge below, with specific reference to Indigenous Australian collections in the UK.

Ethnographic collections are enmeshed with broader imperial histories. In Australia, Indigenous Australian collections were initially built under the conditions of a British colonial rule that included acts of extreme violence. The First Fleet of British soldiers and convicts, sent to create a penal colony in Australia, arrived at Botany Bay, New South Wales between 18 and 20 January 1788. The land they initially settled (which is present day Sydney to the east of Botany Bay) was the territory of the Eora people (this term refers to a number of groups, using the name by which Aboriginal people were known by British colonisers) (see Attenbrow 2010 for a history of Sydney's Aboriginal peoples). As the British colonies became larger, incorporating the territories of more Aboriginal peoples, the competition for land became fierce and there was intense violent resistance in some areas. Many people were removed from their lands forcefully, or by coercion. As European Australia grew, and the separate colonies became one nation, separate from Britain (1901), Indigenous Australians were denied the rights of other inhabitants. They were not considered to be citizens under the Australian constitution and often could not move freely or receive the same wages as non-Indigenous Australians. From 1910 to 1970 many children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families were removed from their parents and sent to residential schools under the assimilation policies of successive

governments (Australian Human Rights Commission 1997).[5] Indigenous movements in the twentieth- and twenty-first-centuries fought against these policies, and others, gaining, among other things recognition of land rights and the repeal of laws that restricted peoples' ability to vote (Sanders 2005: 220-221). These are just a few of the dark histories of the colonial era. During this recent, but impactful, period in Britain and Australia's past, museums in both of these countries operated within the colonial structures of these countries collected Indigenous Australian objects.

Some objects in the BM can be directly traced to difficult histories. In Tasmania, war with British forces led to the devastation of Tasmanian Aboriginal groups (see Lawson 2014). The remaining people were exiled to Flinders Island. Here they made baskets, necklaces, a model canoe and a kelp water container which were sent to be exhibited in Europe. These objects are now in the BM collection (these objects and their histories are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2). During this period the BM also acquired two Tasmanian cremation ash bundles, formed of human remains wrapped in animal skin (British Museum 2006b; Plomley 2008). These remains were collected by a British governmental employee in the context of severe population loss among Aboriginal Tasmanians and unequal power relations.[6] Such difficult histories do not comprise the story of the whole collection. The BM holds over 6,000 Indigenous Australian objects and there are also stories of collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples embedded in the BM collection. Furthermore, specific histories demonstrate how Indigenous peoples traded objects in order to achieve particular political aims (Allen 2015; Guntarik 2009; Morphy 2006, 2012, 2015; Myers 2004; Myers 2002). While the individual stories are nuanced and complex, these collections as a whole are nevertheless embedded with difficult histories from the colonial era.

Such histories raise a specific question for contemporary museum professionals - how to acknowledge difficult pasts that lie in museum collections? Bain Atwood and Macdonald note (in separate works that this question has become particularly prominent in the last three decades (Attwood 2015) describing the outcome as an international 'difficult histories boom', by which he means particular nations have begun investing in ways to acknowledge the darker aspects of

[5] As well as losing their familial and cultural connections these children were often abused and neglected (Australian Human Rights Commission 1997). After decades of campaigning these Stolen Generations and their families received an apology from the Australian Government (given by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd) in 2008.
[6] The bundles were acquired by George Augustus Robinson in about 1838. Robinson was a British settler appointed as a conciliator between Aboriginal people and British settlers in 1828 (National Centre of Biography 1967). The bundles entered the collection of the British Museum only later via the Royal College of Surgeons in 1882 (British Museum 2006b; Petrovic-Steger, Sterk, and Virtanen 2013: 46-67; Plomley 2008).

their histories in museums and memorials (Attwood 2015: 61; Macdonald 2009). In the Australian context calls to confront these pasts, led by Indigenous groups and individuals, have led to large scale permanent and temporary exhibitions exploring the complex histories of colonisation (Attwood 2015; Russell 2001a; Specht and MacLulich 2017; Witcomb 2014). In particular there are now large permanent exhibitions on the topic at the Australian Museum (AM), Sydney; National Museum of Australia (NMA), Canberra; and Museum Victoria (MV); Melbourne (Attwood 2015; Russell 2001a; Specht and MacLulich 2017; Witcomb 2014). Prior to *Indigenous Australia* there had been no major exhibitions of Indigenous Australian material in the UK for over 20 years, meaning the difficult history boom had had little impact. *Indigenous Australia* was therefore the first exhibition in the UK to face this curatorial challenge to understand and represent difficult colonial histories.

The complex collection histories of Indigenous Australian collections also raises questions over the holding and ownership of objects in the UK. Indigenous Australian groups and individuals have contested the holding of objects in UK museums. Prior to the development of *Indigenous Australia* there had been two formal repatriation requests regarding Indigenous Australian human remains in the BM. One of these requests was from a delegation of Aboriginal Tasmanians, regarding the two cremation bundles containing the remains of Aboriginal Tasmanian people (discussed above). This request was granted by the Trustees of the BM in 2006 on the grounds that the traditional mortuary practices had been disrupted (British Museum 2006b; McKinney 2014: 38-39). The other request was regarding two skulls from the islands of Mer and Nagir in the Torres Strait (British Museum 2012; McKinney 2014: 40-41). In this case the Trustees did not accept the claim from a delegation of Torres Strait Islanders, arguing that there was not sufficient evidence that traditional mortuary practices had been disrupted (British Museum 2012; McKinney 2014: 40-41). The skulls remain at the BM. At the beginning of *Indigenous Australia* there had been no formal claims for return of items which were not human remains and currently the BM's governing document does not allow for this ("British Museum Act" 1963). The desire for objects to be returned to Australia was, however, expressed strongly by some Indigenous community members with connections to items in the BM, as illustrated in the section on *Community Consultation* in *Chapter 4*. The holding of objects was, therefore, another part of the challenge emanating from the history of collecting Indigenous Australian material.

The second part of the challenge, quoted by Sculthorpe, embedded in Indigenous Australian collections emerges from the way they have been used and displayed. One of the most troubling uses of Indigenous Australian collections was in constructions of the theory of social Darwinism. During the 19th century Indigenous Australian peoples were constructed by Western commentators to be less sophisticated than other societies, particularly those of European peoples (Morphy and Elliott 1997: 6). British museums played an important role in influencing and reinforcing this prejudice. The perceived simplicity of objects from Indigenous Australian groups was used to support this notion, the concept is now described as social Darwinism, owing to the influence it drew from Darwin's theory of biological evolution (Bowden 1991: 48). Ethnographic museums, as places where material culture was displayed, formed the perfect space for this concept to be demonstrated. The most explicit example of this was the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM), Oxford, which, in the late 19th century, arranged collections of objects by the perceived sophistication of the technology they displayed. These constructions, based on an erroneous concept that there was a form of linear social development defined by the use of certain technologies, placed Indigenous Australians at the earliest stages of human evolution (Gosden, Larson, and Petch 2007: 110; Morphy 1988).

It is now clear that these constructions in museum displays were implicated in imperial projects, reinforcing prejudices against the cultural group on display and even legitimising colonial governments' acts of violence (Arnoldi 1999; Coombes 1994; Marrie 1989; Onciul 2015; Russell 2001b). A number of commentators have argued that museum displays were, unwittingly, perpetuating these problematic representations into the late 20th and early 21st centuries (Clifford 1988: 489-251; 1995; Price 1989, 2007; Russell 2001b). An example would be a pamphlet of the Pitt Rivers Museum, originally produced in 1970, and revised in 1991, which suggests that a recent redisplay allows visitors to compare the 'tools of prehistoric peoples in Europe, Asia and Africa' with 'the tools of people who were in their Stone Age at the time of their discovery by Europeans' (Blackwood and Jones 1991: 3). While Blackwood does not suggest that these peoples were less sophisticated than the European peoples at the time, this remains a possible interpretation, particularly as the description reinforces the idea that human societies are engaged in some form of linear development. In a more recent example, Sally Price argues that the Musée du quai Branly (MQB), Paris, which opened in 2006, perpetuated notions that groups from Africa, Oceania, Asia and the Americas are primitive, isolated and removed from the concerns of other contemporary peoples, by omitting, in its main displays, objects and narratives which demonstrated relationships between different

peoples, and engagement with the commodities and concerns of modernity (such as consumer products) (Price 2007).[7] The ongoing issues of representation were therefore the second part of the challenge that *Indigenous Australia* faced.

The third part of the challenge for colonial era collections lies in ensuring the involvement of communities with cultural connections to the collections, often referred to as 'source communities' (Peers and Brown 2003). This is, however, a debated term. Mark Busse has argued that communities, whose cultures are represented in museums, should not function as source, but as partners (Busse 2008: 194-195). Whatever term is used it is clear that in recent decades indigenous groups and individuals have agitated for more involvement in the care and display of collections. They have worked to ensure that they are not only consulted, but are actively involved in all matters concerning the care and display of collections. This movement has been particularly strong in the settler countries of Canada, New Zealand, the United States of America (US) and Australia. Indigenous museum professionals have been driving forces in these changes. Along with non-indigenous staff they recognise a number of values to these collaborations. Source communities bring knowledge to the collection (Gumbula 2009; Gumbula 2010; Peers and Brown 2003). Indigenous groups and individuals also use museum collections and displays to promote understanding of cultural practices and histories and to further wider political causes and concerns (Morphy 2006, 2007; Myers 1994, 2004).

In recent decades UK ethnographic museums, particularly the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), Cambridge, the PRM, and the BM, have developed and maintained significant relationships with Indigenous Australian communities and used these relationships to inform exhibitions (for descriptions and discussions of these activities see Clark 2013, 2014; Herle 2003; 2005: 50-51; Herle and Philp 1998; Morton 2015). While British museums regard these collaborations as beneficial they are logistically difficult, requiring substantial investment of time and financial resources, particularly in the light of critiques which have drawn attention to power imbalances in these relationships (Boast 2011; Clifford 1997: 207-208).[8] For these reasons I have classed meaningful engagement with source communities as the third part of the

[7] One response to this critique would be that this new museum had a number of works by contemporary Indigenous Australian artists embedded into the architecture of the building. These works, in a range of media, from paint to photography, demonstrated the ongoing and dynamic arts scenes in the region. The artists were Lena Nyadbi, Judy Watson, Gulumbu Yunupingu, Ningura Napurrula, John Mawurndjul, Paddy Nyunkuny Bedford, Michael Riley, Tommy Watson.

[8] I consider the complex debate around community engagement in more depth in the section on Community Consultation in Chapter 3.

challenge emanating from the colonial legacy. Together these discussions provide not only the critical background to the critical debates discussed in this thesis, but they also provide an insight into the debates and trends that many of those who worked on *Indigenous Australia* had a deep knowledge of. This is particularly true of the museum professionals, academics, community consultants and artists who were working for, or with, the BM on producing the exhibition. As the analysis in the following chapters demonstrates, these participants' experiences and activities were conducted with full awareness of the complex legacy of the collection they were working with.

Critical Approach

There are few studies which provide an overview of a single exhibition. Two notable exceptions are a work edited by Karen Jacobs and one edited by Rosanna Raymond and Amiria Salmond, both of which provide a number of different perspectives (from artists to conservators) of the exhibition process and reception in exhibitions of Oceanic objects (Jacobs 2009; Raymond and Salmond 2008). Both of these studies provide a valuable overview of the complexity of the exhibition process and the different experiences of different types of participants. Both also provide an insight into the growing importance of source communities in all aspects of the exhibition process. More relevant to this study (as an analysis which was conducted by one person) is a monograph by Macdonald (2002) on an exhibition at the Science Museum, London (SM). Macdonald provides a detailed ethnography of an exhibition, titled *Food for Thought*. Her analysis is particularly valuable for revealing how difficult it is to trace a coherent set of aims from the beginning of an exhibition to the final product. The impetus for the exhibition was partly concern, in the media and among science professionals, over public knowledge (or lack of knowledge) about food and the impact this has on health. The people involved in producing it had some clear aims for how to achieve this, but the finished exhibition was the product of a complex combination of opinions and activities as well changing circumstances and pressures of time and resources. It is a reminder that grand ideological visions (of which she describes a few in the broader political and social background to the display) are often far removed from the way an exhibition operates in practice.

In this study I will draw on Macdonald's work by considering the exhibition as a complex process which has a relationship to broader debates in society, but is best understood as series

of nuanced processes and events, emanating from a range of opinions and practical considerations. My division of the exhibition into three broad stages 'production, text, consumption' also directly follows Macdonald (Macdonald 2002: 16). I have chosen this model, because, as Macdonald explains, it is one which closely mirrors the exhibition process as it happens and is understood by those involved across time (Macdonald 2002: 16-17). In other respects this analysis is underpinned by different approaches to Macdonald. Unlike Macdonald I did not conduct direct research or analysis during the exhibition process. Furthermore, *Indigenous Australia*, as an exhibition of non-Western material, rather than a science exhibition, had a very different background both critically and in terms of the wider sphere of museum activities in which it operated.

One of the issues when undertaking such a broad study of an exhibition of non-Western material is how to incorporate the experiences and understandings of the various individual people who were involved, while also considering the broader theoretical debates about the role of ethnographic museums now and in the past. Both approaches are valuable, but they are not necessarily compatible – the complex and diverse experiences reported by individual participants can contradict overarching theories of the impacts of museum displays in wider society. My analysis below considers critical approaches to exhibitions of non-Western material (with particular emphasis on Indigenous Australian objects) and in doing so explores this tension between theoretical debates and the lived experiences of participants. Through this discussion I establish a methodology for this thesis.

One way of studying Indigenous Australian exhibitions is to conduct a critical analysis (see, for example Price 2007; Russell 2001b). In the most in depth of these Lynette Russell uses visual and textual analysis to compare 19th century representations of Aboriginal Australians to those in contemporary exhibitions (Russell 2001b). She notes that contemporary exhibitions may continue problematic forms of representation that were used in the past. For example, by using historic 'European representations' (such as 19th century photographs, paintings and descriptions) of Aboriginal people, 'authorised representations of Aboriginal Australia in museums continue to produce images in which the native artisan is both subject of study and subject person' (Russell 2001b: 54-55).

As Russell demonstrates the comparative approach is useful for considering the broader hegemonic systems that are in operation around contemporary museums and how they may

present themselves in exhibitions of Indigenous Australian material. The approach does not, however, describe the experiences and opinions of people who took part in the exhibitions. In Russell's study the 'native artisan' and the people who create the 'authorized representations' are abstract figures, rather than individuals, and the viewer is merely hypothetical (Russell 2001b: 54-55). Their real life counterparts may well have experiences which challenge the structures Russell describes. For example, an Indigenous Australian artist may include European imagery in their work in order to subvert past practices of representation. Brook Andrew, an artist from the Wiradjuri community in New South Wales, works with European photographs in this way. In his 1996 work *Sexy and Dangerous,* he overlays a photograph with text to highlight prejudices about Aboriginal men, summarised by the words in the title, which are perpetuated through the photographs (fig. 4). When this work is hung in a museum it not only conveys the agency of the artist, it also may, in turn, challenge the viewer to reconsider European representations of Aboriginal men. Such examples of individual experiences would not disprove Russell's broader theoretical reading of the problematic nature of contemporary representations of Indigenous Australian peoples in museums, but they do demonstrate that using such readings in isolation can deny or even undermine the experiences and agency of both indigenous and non-indigenous people in the museum process.

Another issue of the hypothetical comparison is that it constructs a history of colonisation as a homogenised scheme of violence and control. While objects were obtained under the unequal power conditions of imperialism and colonisation in these countries, these broader systems should not be confused with individual experiences on the ground. Detailed histories of collecting in Australia, and other postcolonial contexts, demonstrate a nuanced picture of the role of museums and the people who worked with them in the imperial experience (Longair and McAleer 2012: 5; Morphy 2006, 2015). In their review of a number of case studies from colonial contexts Longair and McAleer determine that 18th and 19th century museums 'became "tools" of empire', but also demonstrate that the individual institutions were rarely well connected, either financially or politically, with colonial administrations (Longair and McAleer 2012: 5). They were run, instead, by individuals with diverse experiences and opinions, which may not have supported the broader hegemonic systems which were in operation (Longair and McAleer 2012).

Ignoring these specific histories of collections can deny the agency of the people who made and used the objects in the past, just as ignoring the contemporary individual can deny their

experiences. In his analysis of 'making Yolngu collections' Morphy describes how Yolngu people, of North East Arnhem Land had particular motivations for trading objects with non-Indigenous collectors during the 1920s to 1960s (Morphy 2006, 2015). He writes '[Yolngu] produced material objects for exchange and as part of a process of persuasion to encourage others to understand the values of their society and to recognise their right to autonomous existence in land they believed they owned' (Morphy 2015: 372). Morphy demonstrates that Yolngu not only had agency in the collection process, but that they also used this for particular aims. Yolngu used encounters with outsiders, including collectors, to build knowledge of the 'power structures, systems of government and values of European Australian society' and subsequently transmitted this knowledge to the political arena (Morphy 2015: 373). To imply that all objects in museums' collections were stolen, therefore, not only denies indigenous people's involvement in the collecting process, it also overlooks their broader histories (see also Jacobs 2012; O'Hanlon & Welsch 2000).

One way to avoid issues of the hypothetical analysis of the exhibition is to perceive the relationships that take place in an exhibition process differently. The hypothetical comparison often constructs the exhibition as a site where certain institutions (such as colonial governments) act on others (such as the Indigenous groups being represented). This suggests a dichotomous relationship in which the represented 'other' has no power. An alternative is to envision the exhibition as a site of encounter; a meeting place where each of the participants has some influence. This conception of the exhibition, forms the central premise of this thesis. It builds on broader studies of encounters in the Oceanic region, in particular, on the work of Morphy (as described above), Anne Salmond and Nicholas Thomas, on conceptualising relationships, both contemporary and historic, between European and Oceanic peoples (Morphy 2015; Salmond 1991, 1997; Thomas 1991, 1994a). Through the analysis of relationships in historic colonial encounters in the Pacific, Thomas illustrates how each of the different participants have agency in an encounter, no matter how unequal the overarching relationships may be (Thomas 1991, 1994a). For example in his discussion of the exchange of material culture this agency is present in the possibility for mutual appropriation, which he considers in two consecutive chapters titled *The Indigenous Appropriation of European Things* and *The European Appropriation of Indigenous Things* (Thomas 1991: 83-184). Thomas does not suggest that there is equality in these relationships, but presents them in this way in order to disrupt 'us/them oppositions' (Thomas 1991: 5). Similarly Bronwen Douglas traces signs of

indigenous agency (which she terms 'countersigns' in colonial texts and images (Douglas, Bronwen 2006).

Thomas' conceptualisation of the encounter lends itself well to the context of a museum exhibition as it allows for each of the different participants to have influence over the other. Considering an exhibition in this way has similarities to Clifford's conception of the museum as a 'contact zone' in which different cultural groups encounter and engage with other, both face to face and through objects (Clifford 1997: 118-219). Steven Hooper et al. discuss *Pacific Encounters: Art and Divinity in Polynesia* (May – August 2006), an exhibition at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (SCVA), Norwich in terms which echo Clifford's and Thomas' conceptions. They emphasise the combined involvement of Polynesians and Europeans in the exhibition and describe how this influenced the 'understandings and emotions' of those involved (Hooper et al. 2012: 17). The authors acknowledge that the exhibition 'began as an essentially European and Europe based initiative', but describe how 'engagement with Polynesians and Polynesian concepts… palpably transformed the exhibition, the display of artworks of which it was composed, and the experiences of visitors and curators alike' (Hooper et al. 2012: 10). By illustrating how encounters in the exhibition space influence participants' understandings the authors demonstrate the value of a nuanced evaluation of an exhibition which considers the individual events and people involved (also see Herle 2008; Thomas 1995). They provide a strong alternative to evaluations which rely solely on a visual analysis in which the participants in an exhibition are hypothetical constructs. Conceiving the exhibition as a site of encounter also provides a way for Hooper et al. to consider the roles of objects. Other studies of the exhibition process have considered the changing histories and meanings of objects when they enter a museum and how engagement with objects might influence the exhibitor and the visitor, something which has proved important in other studies of the exhibition process (Clifford 1988; Dudley 2012; Herle 2003; Knowles 2013; Stocking 1985a: 4-5).

One omission from many of these conceptions of the exhibition encounter is the in-depth analysis of the actual (rather than imagined) experiences of visitors. In particular there have been few published studies, in the context of Oceanic exhibitions, of the meanings visitors may bring to the exhibition and how this may influence their understandings. This has begun to be addressed in studies which consider the exhibition as a 'dialogic' encounter, in which visitor's construct meanings through communication with each other and museum staff (directly or through feedback) (Coffee 2013; Witcomb 2003). Kevin Coffee draws on the work of Vyotsky

and Bakhtin to argue that because understandings develop from social interactions ('consciousness is dialogic'), museums should consider the role of visitors, and their interactions with each other, in constructing meaning in the exhibition space (Coffee 2013: 163). 'Museums are agents of ideologies,' Coffee writes, 'but visitors are also agents in the process and not empty vessels waiting to be filled' (Coffee 2013: 163). Coffee uses this conception to study visitors' actual, rather than imagined, responses to an exhibition, examining unsolicited feedback in the form of comments books. Although Coffee uses a different critical concept to Clifford, Thomas and Hooper et al, their work shares the same basic premise - that all participants in the exhibition process have the ability to influence its meanings and outcomes. Coffee's approach is therefore valuable in this study as it provides a way to consider visitor experience within the broader framework of the exhibition as encounter.

The exhibition as a complex encounter: A critical methodology

This thesis builds on the concept of the/an exhibition as a site of encounter by considering the meanings which participants brought to *Indigenous Australia* and the impact of their engagements with each other. In this respect the main focus is on individual experiences and understandings, rather than theoretical readings. As the discussion above illustrates, however, there is no single coherent analytical framework for considering an exhibition in this way. The exhibition as encounter is instead a broad concept with many different facets. Furthermore, while the focus of this thesis is not on hypothetical readings, these do, nevertheless have value, particularly when considering the broader question of the role of colonial era collections in broader society. I have therefore developed a methodology which is underpinned by the concept of the exhibition as encounter, but also incorporates a range of analytic forms and embraces the complex (and potentially even contradictory) conclusions that this offers. Each chapter of the thesis focuses on different approaches. *Chapter 2: Genealogy* considers how the history of collecting and displaying material in the BM influenced the final exhibition. It therefore constructs the exhibition of these objects partly as the result of a series of meaningful encounters between makers, objects, collectors and museum professionals. *Chapter 3: Production* considers the aims of different people involved in making *Indigenous Australia*, and how these peoples' relationships with each other influenced the finished display and the BM's wider activities. *Chapter 4: Text* is a critical reading of the finished exhibition, consisting of a description and theoretical analysis. *Chapter 5: Consumption* interrogates the meanings and experiences of audiences in *Indigenous Australia*, taking a dialogic approach to visitors'

unstructured comments in the form of feedback cards, emails and Twitter conversations, to consider not only their response to the exhibition, but also the meanings they bring and create.

Ethical review

I undertook two ethical reviews for this project, both of which were approved by the UEA General Ethics Research Committee. The first took place at the beginning of my research. The second took place after I had finished my role on the *Indigenous Australia*, in recognition of the fact that, while the exhibition was part of my original research, working on it had changed the direction of my thesis. The basis of both reviews was to reduce the potential of harm for all people who may be associated with the project, and ensure consent when necessary, in line with Economic and Social Council Research Guidelines (Economic and Social Research Council Great Britain 2015). This is necessary for any study involving human participants, but as Russell and Oscar have argued, Indigenous Australian people have historically often been denied consent and involvement in discussions of their own cultural material and therefore there is a particular need to ensure involvement in contemporary research processes (Oscar 2015; Russell 2001b: xiii & 5-6). Prior informed consent was gained for interviews. For the use of audience data I requested special permission from the BM Interpretation Department after the exhibition had ended and conducted a detailed, separate ethical review, which is discussed in *Chapter 5*. Consent has also been obtained in the few cases of anecdotal evidence where particular individuals are identified. I should add, however, that these are my versions of an event. I have not obtained special permission to reproduce talks, interviews and writings which are already in the public domain and are explicitly engaging with the topic in question (the role of Indigenous Australian material in the UK). I do however ensure that these are used in this thesis in the way in which they were intended, to illustrate the author's view on a particular aspect of the use of Indigenous Australian collections in their own words, rather than interrogating or analysing them for any other meanings.

2. Genealogy

Indigenous Australia was presented as a seminal moment – 'the first [exhibition] in the UK devoted to the history and culture of Indigenous Australians' (British Museum 2015). The BM had, however, collected and displayed Indigenous Australian material for well over 200 years. The reason this exhibition was different, Sculthorpe and MacGregor explained in the first Press Conference on the 22 January 2015, was that it showcased both the history of the BM's collection and the shared history of Australia and Britain. MacGregor reiterated this during the opening events saying the exhibition was 'the first time it's been possible, for a public anywhere in Europe, to think about the story of Australia as told by Aboriginal objects' (Neill 2015). These two features had been overlooked in previous considerations of the collection, both in terms of research and displays. This raises a number of questions. Why had these aspects of the collection not been considered before? What other meanings did the collection have, other than the historic? And why were these historic meanings important now? This chapter considers these questions by tracing the development of the Indigenous Australian collections at the BM. Although it touches on the history of key acquisitions and individuals, the focus is on charting the changing attitudes towards the BM's Indigenous Australian collections, and more broadly, the changing ideas of what the Museum's role should be. In doing so it considers the wider ethos behind, and background to, *Indigenous Australia*.

Expeditions and artificial curiosities: 1770 – c.1850

It is possible that the British Museum acquired its first Indigenous Australian objects in the late eighteenth-century at some point after Lieutenant (later to become Captain) James Cook's first Pacific voyage, which landed at mainland Australia in April 1770. Objects from this voyage are known to have entered the BM collection during the late eighteenth-century via various donors, including Cook and Joseph Banks, who was the botanist on Cook's ship, HMS *Endeavour*, and later became a Trustee of the Museum (Miller 1973: 75; Wilson 2002: 42-44). It has been suggested that one BM object, a bark shield (fig. 5; object ref. 108), came from this voyage, and was picked up by Cook or one his men during an encounter with Gweagal people at Botany Bay. This attribution had been made through contemporary descriptions and images

(Attenbrow and Cartwright 2014; Nugent 2009; Thomas 2016: 335-336).[9] This provenance has, however, been debated in the past and more recently (Kaeppler 1978: 250; Megaw 1993: 28; Nugent and Sculthorpe 2018; Thomas 2018). It is unclear precisely when the shield entered the Museum's collection since objects from Cook's first voyage came to the BM through various routes over a number of decades. In addition many non-Western collections, classified as 'artificial curiosities', were not formally accessioned during the early days of the Museum (see Wilson 2002: 43). A cautious hypothesis, therefore, is that the shield was acquired at some point in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth-century. Regardless of when it arrived at the Museum, it is believed to be one of the first Australian objects to reach the UK and therefore represents the very earliest period of British collection and display of Indigenous Australian material.

The (now disputed) history of the bark shield, as the earliest Australian object known to have arrived in the UK, means that it has a certain star quality. It is on permanent display in the Enlightenment Gallery (fig. 6) and was included in the BM's multimedia guide tour (as of 2015) and in MacGregor's popular book and Radio 4 series, (both titled *A History of the World in 100 Objects*). Its current status and the reasons for this, including the story attributed to its acquisition, are discussed later in this chapter. The shield's current status stands in contrast to the lack of knowledge of its actual role and location in previous centuries. This absence from the historical record does resonate, however, with the ambiguous status of Oceanic objects in the Museum and in eighteenth-century scientific thought. Within the BM, the Otaheite or South Sea Room, where Oceanic objects were displayed, was popular with visitors, but of little academic interest to staff (Wilson 2002: 43-44). This lack of interest is clear in the labelling, which provided no information other than the name of the donor (Wilson 2002: 43). Even Banks, who collected many man-made objects from Oceania appeared to be far more interested in the scientific potential of botanical specimens (Thomas 1994b; Wilson 2002: 43-44).

One reason for this ambivalence towards Oceanic collections is that they were not perceived as having scientific value in terms of understanding the people who made them. Thomas illustrates this with an illuminating reading of Cook's and Bank's writings on their Pacific voyages. He noted that man-made artefacts were not used in 'any comparative study of technology or craft;

[9] In particular the attribution has been based on two contemporary images by John Frederick Miller (Miller, 1771, "Shield, fish spear and javelins from New Holland" British Library, Add. 23920, f.35) and Thomas Chambers, reproduced in Sydney Parkinson (Chambers 1773). The attribution has also been based on accounts in the journals of Cook, Parkinson and Banks (Beaglehole 1963: 54; 1967: entry for April 29th, 1770; Parkinson 1984: 134).

they played no significant part in the ethnographical project of discriminating and assessing the advancement of the various peoples encountered, which instead turned on distinctions in political forms and the condition of women' (Thomas 1994b: 130). The scientific lack of interest in Oceanic collections bears little resemblance to later attitudes, which focus on the insights that artefacts provided about the individuals and groups who made them. The ambiguous, or even neglected place of the Oceanic collection, and the 'artificial curiosities', proved however to be longer lasting issues within the Museum.

The earliest Australian objects that can be convincingly placed in the Museum's collection arrived in the 1830s. The first documented acquisitions were Noongar artefacts from Swan River, Western Australia (now Perth region). These included a knife and a hafted axe which were displayed in *Indigenous Australia* (object refs. 134; 135). They were donated by Samuel Neil Talbot, a British man who spent time in the area (Sculthorpe et al. 2015: 219). Braunholtz, a later curator, described the objects as entering the collection in 1832 and 1839, but the acquisition registers only support the later date (Braunholtz 1953b: 92). A number of items from the east of Australia were donated in 1839 and 1848 by Thomas Mitchell, Surveyor General of Victoria, who played a significant role in the European exploration of Australia (Mitchell 1838a, b, 1848). These include a boomerang, net, shield and knotted string bag from south eastern Australia and a shield and club from Queensland, all of which are still in the collection (object refs. 130; 138; and BM: Oc1848,0202.2; Oc1848,0202.1; Oc1839,1012.9; Oc1839,1012.6). Objects acquired from the Torres Strait Islands in the first half of the nineteenth-century included a turtle shell mask in the form of a human face, with an open mouth and teeth whitened by lime (fig. 7; BM: Oc1846,0731.3). It was made on Erub and 'purchased', for a knife, by Joseph Beete Jukes. Jukes was the naturalist on HMS *Fly*, a naval vessel which charted routes around the north east coast of Australia between 1842 and 1846 (Jukes 1847: 178-179, vol. 1). The mask, and a number of other items Jukes collected, were accessioned into the BM collection in 1846.

The accession of these collections coincided with changing attitudes towards ethnographic collecting and its purpose. Jukes and Mitchell's writings demonstrate changing perceptions in relation to Indigenous Australian collections (Jukes 1847; Mitchell 1838b, a, 1848). Most obvious is the change in terminology that had taken place by the middle of the nineteenth-century. Describing how he acquired the mask from Erub, Jukes writes:

> I purchased for a knife a curious tortoise- shell mask, or face, made to fit over the head, which was used they told me, in their dances. It was very fairly put together, with hair, beard and whiskers fastened on, projecting ears, and pieces of mother-of-pearl, with a black patch in the centre for the eyes. [The text continues in a footnote] This and all the other native implements and curiosities I collected, are now in the British Museum. (Jukes 1847: 178-179, vol. 1) [10]

While Juke's describes the mask as 'curious' he uses the term differently from the eighteenth-century BM classification of 'artificial curiosities'. Rather than being a category for all non-Western objects 'curiosities' is used to distinguish an object he has less familiarity with, from 'implements' (tools, including weapons) to which he can more easily attribute a function.

While Jukes does not explicitly term the objects he collects 'ethnographic', he discusses Torres Strait and Aboriginal objects in a chapter on the 'science of Ethnology'. Much of Juke's ethnology dwells on social relations, but certain passages show an interest in studying material culture, in particular as a way to compare and distinguish cultures. For example Jukes evaluates the 'intellectual capacity' of Aboriginal people partly by comparing their technology to other Pacific groups (Jukes 1847: 242-243, vol. 2). He also uses material culture to consider trade and exchange across Australia, describing shared forms of watercraft as evidence of links between the tip of Cape York Peninsular and the Torres Strait and noting that these large canoes are not used outside of the Cape York region (Jukes 1847: 232-246, vol. 2). Mitchell's accounts of his expeditions also demonstrate a scientific interest in the objects he collected. He records how baskets, nets and boomerangs were used, in different areas, for hunting, fishing and collecting food and relates these descriptions to specific objects he collects (for example see Mitchell 1838a: 100, 287, 305, 287-289, 387; 1838). Mitchell was, however, far more interested in utilising the technology that he saw in Australia. He was fascinated by boomerangs and described different forms of boomerang, the method of throwing and their patterns of flight (Mitchell 1853; Mitchell 1838b: 342). When he returned to England after his first series of expeditions he patented a 'boomerang propeller' (Mitchell ; Sculthorpe et al. 2015: 219). His article on the propeller includes drawings of the south eastern boomerang which he used as a model (Mitchell 1853). Mitchell's interest in the boomerang is far removed from Jukes' writings, which mix fascination with occasional ethnographic reflections. The two collectors are united however, in their recognition of a scientific role for the objects they collected.

[10] The Erub mask was on display at the Museum of Practical Geology before it came to the BM, but this must have only been for a short period as Jukes describes it being in the BM collection in 1847, the year after he returned from the voyage (Jukes 1847: 178-179, vol. 1).

This increasingly scientific attitude towards Australian collections, particularly an interest in using objects for comparative ethnography, was reflected in changing terminology and displays at the British Museum. By the end of this period, the Oceanic objects were no longer artificial curiosities but instead part of an Ethnographical Collection. This was a coherent ethnographic display, arranged geographically and culturally. The Torres Strait Islander objects, in Case 43, were placed alongside objects from New Guinea (British Museum 1856: 279). Despite knowledge of trade links between the Torres Strait and mainland Australia, Indigenous Australian objects were some distance away in cases 70 and 71 (British Museum 1856: 279). Unlike in the earlier display, the objects were labelled with a name, or even a brief description, as well as the name of the donor. There is also the occasional more detailed description of usage, for example, a group of spearthrowers are described as 'three womerahs, or sticks for throwing spears; the pointed part is put to the end of the spear to aid in the hurling' (British Museum 1856: 279).

Developing a coherent collection (the Franks years): c.1850 – 1913

The interest of individuals, such as Jukes and Mitchell, and the increasingly scientific attitude towards ethnographic objects should not be mistaken for a wider interest in the BM's ethnographic collection in the latter half of the nineteenth-century. Although they accepted ethnographic donations, the BM's staff activities were overwhelmingly focused on the library and the sculpture of the classical world (Mack 1997: 37; Miller 1973: 221-222). By 1858 Edward Hawkins, the Keeper of Antiquities (whose remit included the Ethnographical collections), was desperately petitioning for more space for the non-Western collections, arguing that 'the collection is a valuable one and is well worthy of being properly exhibited' (Miller 1973: 222). Edward Panizzi, the director of the time (known as the Principle Librarian) took the view, however, that the collections belonged in a separate institution and took up valuable space that could have been used for Mediterranean and Near Eastern objects (Mack 1997: 37; Miller 1973: 222).

Despite this opposition the ethnographic collection expanded enormously during the latter half of the nineteenth-century, largely due to the work of Augustus Wollaston Franks. Franks was instrumental in establishing and promoting a large and coherent non-Western collection at the Museum. A medieval scholar and collector, he was appointed as a curator for the British and Medieval Antiquities in 1851. By 1860 he was keeper of a new department that included Ethnography, British and Medieval Antiquities and when he retired in 1896 he had increased the ethnographic collections from an estimated 3,700 artefacts to over 38,000 (King 1997: 136). Unlike many of his contemporaries at the Museum Franks had a strong belief that the BM should hold and display objects from non-western countries. In 1866 he wrote:

> Ethnography has assumed such a totally different aspect within the last few years; its scientific and historical value has been so fully recognised that I feel sure that… it will be thought desirable to keep here the collections which, when properly arranged, will be highly attractive and popular. (Franks, quoted in Miller 1973: 313)

From Franks' account it appears that his own regard for the ethnographic collection was matched by the increasing status of ethnography as a discipline, and its popularity with Museum visitors.

One of Franks' strengths was establishing relationships with other collectors and dealers. This talent led to one of the most important ethnographic donations in the Museum's history, the Christy bequest. On his death in 1865 Henry Christy, a banker and textile manufacturer, bequeathed his collection (which stretched far beyond ethnographic items) to the BM after a long friendship with Franks. Jonathan King estimates that there were over a thousand ethnographic items in Christy's collection at his death (King 1997). The bequest included a number of Indigenous Australian artefacts and more were purchased by Franks with money that Christy provided for the development of the ethnographic collections (King 1997). Together the two parts of the bequest expanded the Indigenous Australian collections from a few hundred to a few thousand objects.[11]

The Christy bequest, along with the other collections and donations obtained under Franks, not only expanded the size and scope of the Australian collection, but also added more material from the very earliest period of Australia and Britain's shared history. These included objects from New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia, which were acquired by Christy in

[11] It is impossible to provide an exact figure as Franks often catalogued objects he obtained by other means under the Christy collection.

the 1860s from the collection of George Annesley, 2nd Earl of Mountnorris. As Annesley died in 1844 the collection can be placed at a very early period of British colonisation of Australia. Franks himself tracked down a number of other artefacts from early encounters. These included a serrated spear point, which was obtained from Aboriginal people living at Hanover Bay, Western Australia in 1821, by Phillip Parker King, during his voyage to survey the western coastline of Australia (fig. 8). Franks also acquired earlier Australian objects through a larger donation from Haslar Naval Hospital museum (Wilson 2002: 159).

In addition to tracing early Australian objects, Franks acquired contemporary Australian objects from events which now loom large in Australian history. For instance, he obtained two knives from Robert O'Hara Burke and William John Wills' ill-fated expedition to traverse the interior of Australia from south to north (Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria) in 1860-1861 (object ref. 137; BM: Oc.9125). The most fruitful of Franks' relationships, in terms of the Australian collection, was with Alfred Cort Haddon, now recognised as a founding figure in the modern discipline of Anthropology. Haddon donated an extensive and well documented collection of materials from the Torres Strait. In obtaining these and the earlier objects, Franks built upon the first Australian acquisitions to create a unique collection of artefacts from various regions in Australia.[12] Some of these now represent the earliest encounters between Indigenous Australian and British peoples. Many more relate, more broadly, to foundational events in the British colonisation of Australia, providing Indigenous Australian perspectives to a period of immense historic significance.

Franks' intention was not to create a record of Australia's history. Instead he was interested in comparative ethnography, based on concepts of race; writing that the ethnographic collection 'should illustrate the manners and customs of such races as have not been subjected directly to European civilisation, so as to furnish the student with the means of examining the affinities and differences between such races and also to reconstruct some of the lost pages of the history of the world' (BM Officers Reports, 10 February 1868, quoted in King 1997: 140). Franks then explains that 'new materials' could not be obtained from many parts of the world, because they had been too influenced by European trade and settlement. It was, therefore, 'necessary to search European Museums' for earlier collections (BM Officers Reports, 10 February 1868, quoted in King 1997: 140). The collection that was to be later celebrated in *Indigenous Australia*

[12] It should be noted here that not all of the Franks' collections were acquired, initially, for the BM - many were in his private collection and bequeathed to the BM on his death.

for its historical value (dating to the earliest period of Australia's and Britain's shared history) is, therefore a by-product of Franks' campaign to preserve the artefacts of an imagined past before the contaminating arrival of European 'civilisation'.

Comparative ethnography was often used to support notions of social Darwinism, which were prevalent at the end of the nineteenth-century. By 1910, ethnography itself was defined in social Darwinist terms in the *BM Handbook to the Ethnographical collections*, which was prepared under the direction of Franks' successor as Keeper, Charles Hercules Read. 'Ethnography,' the guide explained 'is that branch of the general science of man (Anthropology) descriptive of the manners and customs of particular peoples, and of their development from savagery towards civilisation' (Joyce and Dalton 1910: 10). As a significant branch of this theory relied on comparing the objects made by different peoples, it enabled and enhanced prejudices against Australian Aboriginal peoples in particular, who were perceived to have a simple and therefore primitive material culture (Joyce and Dalton 1910: 106-108).

The prominence of social Darwinism in the guidebook should not be taken, however, as evidence that it formed the basis for ethnographic collecting at the BM during this time, or that these views were promoted in the displays. John Mack charts Franks' activities across his years at the Museum, to demonstrate that while he showed an interest in social Darwinism, he was more concerned about building a collection that would allow comparisons between cultures and societies more generally (Mack 1997). The role of the ethnographic collection at the time was, therefore, as a wider project of record and comparison, rather than a narrow demonstration of social Darwinism. This was reflected in the way the collection was displayed.

Another collector of the time, Augustus Henry Lane-Fox Pitt Rivers, was arranging non-Western objects to illustrate social Darwinism through a 'typographical' arrangement, which involved the inflexible comparison of objects of the same type and function from different parts of the world, to demonstrate the perceived development of societies. This is illustrated in his arrangement of clubs (fig. 9), which places an Aboriginal club at the centre of the image and therefore at the beginning of the evolutionary scheme. The ethnographic collection at the BM was not arranged along these typographical lines. In contrast the BM Ethnographic Gallery was, at least by the end of the nineteenth-century,[13] organised according to geographical location and

[13] Much of the ethnographical collection was, for some time, housed off site in Christy's former apartment before being moved to the new Ethnographical Gallery at Bloomsbury in the 1880s (Wilson 2002: 159).

broad cultural links between groups (Mack 1997: 47-48). It also appears from contemporary accounts that the Gallery was crowded, if not confusingly cramped (Braunholtz 1953b: 92). Unlike the Pitt Rivers method, which used orderly arrangements to promote a particular theory, it would not have been possible to make such narrow readings in the busy displays at the BM.

Information on the collection, where visible, would have been largely in the form of hand written labels, either placed near objects, or simply tied on. Many, often in Franks' handwriting, have very simple descriptions which give the type of object and location (sometimes only as specific as 'Australia'), for example 'Spearthrower, Australia'. If this type of label did not go into the depth required to promote social Darwinist theories, some of the more detailed examples appeared to ignore, or even subvert these ideas. Where objects came to the Museum via an interested collector/donor, these often arrived with detailed descriptions. The labels on Haddon's Torres Strait collection offers a particular contrast to Franks' usual labels. Written in Haddon's handwriting, sometimes using the first person, the labels give extensive information about the collection. A typical example reads 'Baiif The war-headdress of Kabagi the late chief of Tud [Tudu, Torres Strait Islands]. The name is derived from the resemblance of the feathers to the heavy rain clouds of the N.W. monsoon'.[14]

There is disparity between the labels which give simple descriptions of object types and locations, and Haddon's labels, which not only contain more information, but also present a picture of the history and perspectives of the groups and individuals he met in the Torres Strait. Haddon is far more concerned with semantic nuances and historic details than with categorising and comparing the types of object he collects. In this respect he appears to contradict the BM *Handbook*'s description of ethnography as a comparative study of peoples' development from 'savagery to civilisation' (Joyce and Dalton 1910: 10). Haddon complicates notions of 'savage,' undeveloped people by building a picture of complex Torres Strait societies, and the more detailed his descriptions become, the more difficult it is to make sweeping comparisons between the objects in his Torres Strait collection and those of other cultures. As an ornament, the headdress from Tudu can be compared to ornaments from other cultures (for example, according to notions of technological complexity in their construction), but there is no equivalent way of comparing its significance as an historical artefact, or as a visual and linguistic metaphor for the changing seasons. The distinction between Haddon's interpretation

[14] Label in the collection of the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas. The second sentence has been crossed out, in pencil, at a later date.

of the objects and the description of ethnography in the *Handbook* illustrates that not only was there was no single concept of ethnography at the end of the nineteenth-century (no matter how prominent ideologies of social Darwinism were), but also that there was no overarching narrative to the BM's Indigenous Australian displays.

Education and aesthetics: 1914 – 1969

The two world wars disrupted the Museum's activities severely and there is little of significance to record about the ethnographic collection during these years, except that, like the other collections and the Museum building itself, it was subject to movement, damage and neglect, causing issues which were remedied in the decades afterwards. During the inter-war years the bureaucratic status of the ethnographic collection changed again as the Department of British and Medieval Antiquities and Ethnography was divided into more manageable areas. Despite calls for a separate department, ethnography became part of a new Department of Ceramics and Ethnography, described by Wilson, a later director, as 'entirely irrational, if correctly named' (Wilson 2002: 227). The Keeper was Robert Lockhart Hobson, a ceramicist, but the ethnography section was run by his deputy Thomas Athol Joyce. Joyce continued as deputy keeper when the ethnography sub-department was moved to a Department of Oriental Antiquities and Ethnography in 1933. After World War II, there was an increasing focus on the public mandate of the Museum. It was during this period that Ethnography finally became its own department (in 1946), headed by Hermann Justus Braunholtz, who had succeeded Joyce in 1938.

As with earlier decades there was little specific interest in the Australian collections during this period. More generally however, ethnography was achieving increasing status as a field of study. Joyce and Braunholtz, like Read and Franks before them, maintained links with individuals and institutions central in the developing field of anthropology. The early twentieth-century was a defining period in the development of anthropological theory, with the emergence of scholars whose influence is still felt today, including A.C Haddon, Franz Boas, Bronisław Malinowski, W. H. R. Rivers and E. Evans-Pritchard. Some of these figures donated collections to the Museum, but their most important legacy was the professionalisation of anthropology, which led to changing practices within the Ethnography Department. The first change was an increasing emphasis on academic practices, including university training for curatorial staff,

and the second was the promotion of well documented field collecting, often undertaken at the Museum's request, or directly by museum staff (Wilson 2002: 224-228). The emphasis on running a department whose activities were underpinned by academic rigour and careful fieldwork, continues today.

During this period the Indigenous Australian collections continued to expand, albeit slowly, through donations and purchases. Donations included a group of photographs from Walter Edmund Roth, a British medical doctor, now known for his ethnographical work in Queensland. The photographs accompanied a handwritten manuscript of his publication *Ethnological Studies Among North-West Central Queensland Aborigines* (Roth 1897). Gregory M. Mathews, an Australian ornithologist, donated items from the north of Australia including finely woven and painted bags from the Port Essington region. In 1944 the Department acquired the private collection of African, Oceanic and American material which had belonged to Harry Geoffrey Beasley and Irene M. Beasley. The Beasley donation included Australian artefacts, notably a head or neck ornament from the north of Australia, which has since been attributed to the Kimberley region (object ref. 97). Later came a Tiwi collection of 106 objects (Bathurst and Melville Islands) from Jessie Sinclair Litchfield, and a Yirandali collection of 58 objects (central north Queensland), donated by Mary Montgomerie Bennett. Some of the latter had been collected by Bennett's father, Robert Christison, who had also previously donated objects and who owned a station on Yirandali land (Clark 2013).

While it accepted these donations, there is little evidence to suggest that the Ethnographic Department was actively collecting Australian material. Notably, the only example of Australian artefacts arriving through a direct commission comprised extra items from a natural history expedition. On the instruction of the BM, George Hubert Wilkins collected natural history specimens from Northern Australia between 1923 and 1925. Although this was the primary aim of the trip he also acquired over eighty artefacts, largely from Anindilyakwa people on Groote Eylandt and Yan-nhangu speaking Yolngu people on the Crocodile Islands. These included a bark canoe and knives, wrapped in paper bark for trade. He discusses some of these artefacts and his encounters with Aboriginal people in his publication about the trip (Wilkins 1923). As the purpose of his trip suggests, most of the book concentrates on his observations on flora and fauna (Wilkins 1923).

During the greater part of the twentieth-century, the Indigenous Australian collection is more notable for the things that were not being collected, than for its acquisitions. As well as a general lack of interest in Australian ethnographic collecting, illustrated by the focus of Wilkin's expedition on natural history, there was a specific omission - painting. The Ethnographic Department showed little interest – or even acknowledgement – of painting and other two dimensional art forms; this attitude stands in sharp contrast to the status of Indigenous Australian art today. In the revised 1925 edition the *Handbook to the Ethnographical* collections commented only that 'art [in Indigenous Australia] is at a low stage, but attempts at pictorial representation are found in rock drawings in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, the Central district, and Kimberley, as well as the ceremonial drawings on the ground performed by the central tribes and those on bark of eastern'. Not only does the description dismiss Indigenous Australian art as being 'at a low stage' but it entirely omits the Northern Territory from its state by state summary, thereby ignoring Arnhem Land bark painting, which is now regarded as one of the most distinctive and celebrated Australian art forms. This neglect was reflected in the number and type of acquisitions. Compared to the collections of other museums the BM only acquired a small number of Arnhem Land bark paintings before the 1980s and these arrived sporadically, via London dealers and other unspecified 'vendors' or the occasional donation (BM: Oc1961,02.1; Oc1961,02.2; Oc1961,02.3; Oc1963,06.1; Oc1960,08.1; Oc1966,06.1).

In ignoring bark painting the BM was not merely reflecting wider attitudes. There had been growing awareness of Arnhem Land painting since 1912, when anthropologist Walter Baldwin Spencer returned from fieldwork at Gunbalanya (historically known as Oenpelli) with a substantial collection of paintings he had commissioned there (now at Museum Victoria). As Arnhem Land became less isolated from the rest of Australia, the two decades after the Second World War were an important collecting period for a number of European museums, particularly the Musée des Arts africains et océaniens (MAAO, later the collection became part of the new MQB) in Paris and Museum für Völkerkunde (MV) in Basel. Both obtained striking bark paintings via the Czech artist Karel Kupka, who built relationships with various communities in Arnhem Land, particularly Yolngu artists on the island of Milingimbi. Compared to other European museums at the time the BM's group appears particularly small and, often, poorly documented (there were rarely, for example, names of artists or descriptions of the subject matter). Furthermore, the BM presumably had the opportunity to enquire about bark painting during this time, as the self-taught Australian Anthropologist Charles Mountford

exhibited a collection of bark paintings from Arnhem Land around the UK in 1957 and is known to have been in contact with the BM. There are no direct accounts of decisions not to acquire bark paintings, but Howard Morphy (who worked in the Department at a later date, in the very different ethos of the early 1970s) attributes this to notions that these contemporary works were inauthentic (Morphy 1998: 374). These worries over authenticity echo earlier, nineteenth-century, anxieties about the perceived contamination of European influence.

The few paintings acquired in the 1960s (listed above) could be the earliest acquisition of Indigenous Australian painting by the Museum, but it is likely that two paintings from the Port Essington region arrived much earlier (Oc1967,+.1 & Oc1973,Q.17). They are among the earliest known Australian bark paintings and were found unregistered in the collection (Taçon and Davies 2004). The first was found and registered in 1967, but they are presumed to have come into the collection earlier, during the early- to mid-nineteenth-century. It is presumed that one of the pair (Oc1973,Q.17) arrived in 1855, due to an accompanying description which suggests it came from the large Haslar Hospital donation (Taçon and Davies 2004). These paintings were not considered significant until the early twenty-first century, a pattern that is true of many of the earliest Australian acquisitions.

The early decades of the twentieth-century saw a growing acknowledgement in Europe of non-Western artefacts, as artworks, often termed 'primitive art'. This led to some interest in the BM ethnographic collection which was visited by UK-based sculptors including Jacob Epstein and Henry Moore (Moore 1981; Wilson 2002: 226). These artists and other art world figures were most interested in figurative sculpture, a form extremely uncommon in Aboriginal Australia (although not the Torres Strait), but their interest in non-Western artefacts affected the perception of the ethnographic collection as a whole. Rather than understanding the collection as source material for ethnographic studies these figures viewed and discussed objects as individual works of art, to be appreciated, in particular, for their formal qualities. In Moore's later account of his visits to the Museum in the 1920s this is illustrated in his descriptions of non-Western collections. Discussing a carved figure from Rarotonga, Cook Islands (BM: Oc,LMS.169) he comments: 'What a marvellous sense of style the Pacific sculptors had. Look at the unity of the eyes and mouth, the sharp edges of the chin' (Moore 1981).

The increasing status of 'primitive' art undoubtedly changed perceptions of non-Western collections throughout the first half of the twentieth-century, but the Ethnographic Department

was still set on its well established aims of enabling scientific enquiry, as Braunholtz made clear in his 1953 account of the Department (Braunholtz 1953a: 199). Braunholtz did, however, notice a necessity for more aesthetic displays. He describes, with an air of horror, the 'sickening impact of overcrowded cases' which were a recent feature of the Ethnographic Gallery and details the changes made during his time as Keeper (Braunholtz 1953a: 199). By the 1950s, ethnography still occupied (with minor exceptions) the same galleries as in the late 1800s, but the old crowded displays had disappeared. In their place were more ordered arrangements, in line with 'the new policy of showing fewer objects more attractively' (Braunholtz 1953a: 199). The displays were part of a new approach for the whole Museum, which focused on the experience of the 'majority of visitors', rather than the 'serious student' and 'staff', who were provided for in special study rooms (Braunholtz 1953a: 199). The approach was clearly continued under Braunholtz' successor, Adrian Digby, who became keeper in 1953. A photograph of a display of hafted axes and stone knives in the Australia case from around 1955 shows the new method in action (fig. 10). Carefully placed artefacts, chosen to illustrate a theme (in this case hafting), are interpreted with substantial text. Although it is not possible to read the description, the scene as a whole evokes the narrative-led displays, focused on appealing to and educating the non-expert, which are familiar to today's museum going public.

The Museum of Mankind: 1969 – 1997[15]

In the late 1960s the Trustees approved a new solution for the problem of space for the Ethnographic Department. Under William Fagg, who became Keeper in 1969, most of the collection was moved to offsite storage in East London and a new building was acquired in central London (6 Burlington Gardens, Piccadilly) to house the library, offices and a series of temporary exhibitions. The first of its temporary exhibitions opened in 1970 and in 1972 the building was named the Museum of Mankind (MoM). The move was seen by some as the beginning of a process to establish a separate museum, and displays were designed differently from those at the main British Museum in Bloomsbury (Wilson 2002: 283). John Mack, who worked at the Museum of Mankind from the mid 1970s, describes the atmosphere of independence. 'When I arrived' he explains, 'I had assumed that the Museum of Mankind was a separate institution in all but its financial management. In practice we had a great deal of freedom' (Kingston 2003: 14). Fagg's successor, Malcom McLeod, Keeper from 1974,

[15] Much of the overall impression of the Museum of Mankind comes from discussions with Ben Burt who worked at the Museum throughout this period.

encouraged staff to undertake direct fieldwork as the basis for all other curatorial practices (British Museum 2016; Kingston 2003: 14). This led not only to important contemporary collections, but also to strong relationships between the Museum and many of the groups and individuals, around the world and in diaspora communities in the UK, with links to its collections.

Indigenous Australia was well represented in exhibitions at the Museum of Mankind. During the early years, a number of Torres Strait objects from the Haddon collection were on display.[16] There is more information about an exhibition titled *Aborigines of Australia*, which aimed to provide a broad introduction to Aboriginal Australia and was on display from 1972 until 1982. At 219 objects it was a substantial exhibition and was accompanied by a catalogue and an educational leaflet (Burt 1977; Cranstone 1973). The catalogue, written by curator Brian Cranstone, indicates that the exhibition demonstrated the diversity of Indigenous groups in Australia, providing information on different languages and ways of living in different areas (Cranstone 1973). Drawings compared tools and weapons from different regions, for example, a group of boomerangs. Care was taken to contradict certain prejudices; so for example: 'The Aborigines' Cranstone writes 'are not a warlike people' (Cranstone 1973: 35). The catalogue also provides a history of Aboriginal Australia, beginning with the famous archaeological site at Lake Mungo in New South Wales. As well as celebrating the 'antiquity of man in Australia' the text covered more recent history, including the relationships between people on the North West Coast of Australia (particularly Yolngu in Arnhem Land) and fishermen from Macassar, southern Sulawesi in Indonesia, who visited yearly to collect and process trepang (beche-de-mer) for sale in South-East Asian markets. Cranstone dates this relationship from 'at least 1803, probably much earlier' and notes the profound impact on 'mythology, languages, and religious beliefs' of people in these regions (Cranstone 1973: 11).[17] While the history is short, it indicates a diverse and nuanced history and notes the antiquity of Aboriginal Australia, but also contradicts notions of an unchanging past.

Other parts of the catalogue text are more problematic and support opinions that some of the earliest Museum of Mankind displays portrayed views that were old fashioned for their time or, in attempting to provide more context for the objects on display, succeeded only in creating

[16] I found evidence of this display in a note written by John Mack in the 1970s (Oceania Section files), which indicates that a number of Torres Strait Islander objects from the AC Haddon collection had recently been put on display.

[17] Mulvaney traces the beginning of this relationship to the mid eightennth-century. It continued until 1906, when it was outlawed by the Australian Government (Mulvaney 1989: 22)

'another ethnographic illusion' (Picton 2016). Despite beginning with a history, Cranstone rarely provides dates in the rest of the text and slips between the ethnographic present and the ethnographic past. There is also little information on the specific history of the objects in the collection. Prejudiced or simply incorrect comments about the lives of contemporary Indigenous Australians are even more unsettling to today's reader, such as one passage which refers to 'extinct Tasmanians' (Cranstone 1973). Furthermore, Cranstone's history of Australia ended with the arrival of British settlers. There was no reference to, for example, the violent clashes over land during the early colonial era, and no mention of contemporary Aboriginal rights movements. Instead the ongoing disruption caused by British colonisation was only alluded to in a problematic sentence assessing the 'assimilation of the aborigines [sic] into white Australian society' (Cranstone 1973: 12). While the catalogue perpetuated certain prejudices, it demonstrated shifting opinions from earlier examples and showed how the influx of staff, in particular newly graduated anthropologists, was changing the attitudes towards acquiring and presenting the collections.

The emphasis on collecting and portraying contemporary experiences contrasts with the attitude, which can be traced from Franks onwards, that the Ethnography Department existed to preserve a notional, authentic past. This changing attitude, combined with the persuasive efforts of Howard Morphy, led to the first deliberate collection of Indigenous Australian art in the mid-1980s. By then Morphy had become a curator at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. He worked with staff at the BM to acquire bark paintings from Arnhem Land. In 1986 nineteen bark paintings by Yolngu artists were purchased from Buku Larrngay Arts in Yirrkala, where Morphy had conducted fieldwork (BM: 1986,07.1 - 1986,07.19). The artists came from both Yolngu moieties (Dhuwa and Yirritia) and a number of clans. The group includes some visually arresting pieces from highly regarded artists such as Gumbaniya Marawili (Yithuwa and Madarrpa clans, Yirritja moiety; see BM: Oc1986,07.16) and George Milpurrurru (Ganalbingu clan, 1934-1998). The painting by Milpurrurru, *Magpie Geese/ Water Python* later went on display in *Indigenous Australia* (fig. 11; object ref. 32). As a whole it was a balanced and thoughtful collection, which encompassed a range of styles, and the stories and laws of different geographical locations. The purchase also began a collaboration between the arts centre (now the Buku Larrngay Mulka Centre) and the Museum which has spanned three decades so far. Artists represented by the centre took part in the *Indigenous Australia* exhibition.

The Museum acquired its first acrylic paintings from the Western Desert during the 1980s. The first was a small work by Uta Uta Tjangala (Pintupi people), bought from a collector in 1983

(BM: Oc1983,06.1). Tjangala was a Pintupi leader, rights activist and one of the founding members of the Western Desert art movement. The painting is untitled, but depicts a story associated with Ilkapana, a dreaming site west of Kintore in the western Northern Territory. Ilkapana is part of the vast Wati Kutjara (Two Men) Dreaming, which stretches over thousands of kilometres through the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia. It remained the only desert painting in the collection until 1987, when a group of seven works from artists based around Yuendumu were bought from Warlukurlangu Artists Association (BM accession numbers Oc1987,04.1- Oc1987,04.7). The group included men and women artists and one collaborative work. The acquisition was in preparation for the 1988 *Dreams and the Land* exhibition discussed below and was, presumably, prompted by the 1988 Australian Bicentenary commemorations.

The Bicentenary commemorations also prompted an Australian collection effort from the Prints and Drawing department at the BM. The Bicentennial Folio consisted of 25 prints by Australian artists, produced at the Victorian Print Workshop and commissioned by the National Gallery of Australia. It included works by three Indigenous Australian artists, Robert Campbell Junior, Banduk Marika and Sally Morgan (BM 1988,1210.62; 1988,1210.47; 1988,1210.58). These were the first works by Indigenous Australian artists to be acquired outside of the Ethnographic Department. The inclusion of Indigenous artists in the portfolio demonstrates their acceptance as contemporary artists and Australian artists at a time when these categories were still being broken down in the wider art world. Only a few years before, no Indigenous artists had been included in *Eureka! Artists from Australia*, an exhibition designed as a showcase of contemporary Australian art in London (ICA and the Serpentine). The British Museum's Bicentennial portfolio not only included contemporary works by Indigenous Australian artists, but also avoided judgements based on notions of authenticity. The works chosen showcased a range of styles from artists of different ages and backgrounds.

By the 1980s exhibitions at the Museum of Mankind were radically different from earlier forms. Mack, who was keeper from 1990-2004, describes how the continued emphasis on fieldwork led this change. 'We developed a style of exhibition which was distinctive in that so much of it was based on fieldwork by our own people, and therefore had that authority behind it' (Kingston 2003: 14). Those who visited the Museum of Mankind during this time describe an immediacy and energy to the displays, but also, perhaps more importantly, an anthropological reflexivity and a commitment to challenging the London visitors' prejudices or misconceptions about the

people represented. In his review of the 1993 exhibition, *Paradise: Change and Continuity in the New Guinea Highlands*, James Clifford explains the approach in practice:

> The historicizing [sic] of *Paradise* is aimed primarily at a visitor who believes the New Guinea highlands to be one of the last wild, untouched places. ... And for many who pass through the gallery, the notion that traditional culture must diminish in direct proportion to the increase in Coke and Christianity is axiomatic. Against this, the exhibit shows the people of highland New Guinea producing their own fusion of tradition and modernity… To the extent that visitors to *Paradise* understand some-thing like this, the exhibit will perform an important service. Absolutist, all-or-nothing scenarios for change will be undermined, affirming the historical reality and agency of a diverse humanity. (Clifford 1995: 100).

Like *Paradise*, other exhibitions at the Museum of Mankind aimed to avoid the ethnographic present, placing the locations and individuals represented within historical contexts as well as emphasising the reality of alternative modernities. As Clifford suggests it was standard fare for a contemporary anthropologist, but potentially striking for the general visitor.

Indigenous Australian material featured in a number of these more reflexive exhibitions at the MoM. In 1982 there was a display of a group of Western Desert paintings lent by the Australian collector, Robert Holmes á Court (Kelly and Gordon 2002) (British Museum. AOA Exhibition Archive. *"Australian Aboriginal Paintings – Art of the Western Desert 1982*"). This was one stop of a touring exhibition and was the first exhibition of desert acrylic paintings in a public gallery in the UK. It showcased works by founding members of the Western Desert art movement, including Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri and Tjangala (British Museum. AOA Exhibition Archive. *"Australian Aboriginal Paintings – Art of the Western Desert 1982"*). Although no BM staff visited Australia, the MoM emphasis on contemporary fieldwork and anthropological reflexivity was evidenced by the use of a group of photographs of the artists at work, which were donated and described by the young anthropologist J. V. S. Megaw. Megaw's descriptions included information on the paintings' meanings, as well as more practical information, such as a detail on the amount that Tjangala was paid for a particular work (A$ 1600) (British Museum. AOA Exhibition Archive. *"Australian Aboriginal Paintings – Art of the Western Desert 1982"*).

Australian works were next displayed in a larger exhibition, curated by Eduardo Paolozzi. Paolozzi, who had been influenced by the Museum's ethnographic collection during visits as a

young man, included material from the Torres Strait and Aboriginal Australia in *Lost Magic Kingdoms and Six Paper Moons from Nahuatl* (1985-87), an exhibition combining his work with objects from the collection, which he curated under Malcolm McLeod's directorship. The exhibition aimed to subvert the notion of 'primitive art' and provide an alternative to its insensitive appropriation as stylistic source material for Western artists (Paolozzi 1985). In doing so the exhibition continued the MoM's campaign to redefine non-Western collections and displays. Whether *Lost Magic Kingdoms* succeeded in this is the subject of ongoing debate (Coombes and Lloyd 1986; Levell 2015).

In 1988 the MoM returned to a less contentious portrayal of Indigenous Australia, with *Dreams and the Land: Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Paintings.* The exhibition showcased the new collections of contemporary bark painting from Yirrkala and acrylic paintings from Yuendumu and was one of the group of exhibitions in London commemorating the anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet. Photographs suggest a contemporary gallery feel to the exhibition, with paintings hung on white walls with minimal text, although the bark paintings were inside cases, presumably for conservation reasons (figs. 12 and 13). Like the earlier *Art of the Western Desert*, the display avoided simplistic categories, displaying the works as contemporary art, but also describing their meanings within Western Desert communities. This was partly achieved through a long introductory text by Tess Napaljarri Ross, which told the story of the beginning of the Western Desert art movement, emphasising its importance in passing down 'the law' to future generations, rather than its commercial value (British Museum. AOA Exhibition Archive. File: *"Dreams and the Land: Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Paintings 1988-89"*). By beginning with this long passage the text also privileged the Indigenous voice.

A history of the world (the MacGregor years): 1997 - 2015

In the late 1990s the Ethnography Department began to move its displays, office spaces, and the Anthropology Library back into the main Museum at Bloomsbury, while the collections remained at the external store in East London. The closure of the Museum of Mankind was initiated under the directorship of Wilson, who cited both practical and intellectual reasons for the decision (Wilson 2002: 282-283). The practical reasons centred on the building, especially its listed status, which limited scope for exhibitions and for access. Wilson was more concerned,

however, with the psychological separation between Ethnography and the other British Museum departments. One of his aims was to create a more united museum and he argued that 'overlap with other departments' and 'cross-disciplinary access to the collections' was one of the institutions 'greatest strengths' (Wilson 2002: 283). It is fitting that Wilson wrote the first truly comprehensive history of the BM as an institution (other attempts had considered the architecture or focused on specific departments), as his approach was underpinned by the concept of the Museum as a single institution, with coherent shared aims.[18] The physical return of the Ethnography Department took place as part of this wider intellectual rationalisation of the Museums diverse departments.

The centrepiece of the development was a major programme of building and refurbishment at the Bloomsbury site during the late 1990s, which rationalised the layout of the Museum's public spaces. Most prominently various extensions were dismantled in the Museum's central courtyard, to open up the space that became known as the Great Court. These changes were triggered by the relocation of the British Library, which by this point had taken over large amounts of space at the Bloomsbury site, to a new building in St Pancras. The Great Court, complete with glass roof, was designed by Foster + Partners and opened in 2000 (fig. 14). At its centre Foster retained the Round Reading Room of the old British Library, by providing it with a new façade (previously its walls had simply been those of surrounding buildings). The renovated Reading Room also provided two new exhibition spaces, one within the Reading Room itself, although cleverly partitioned off from the old furnishings. The other, Room 35, lay behind the historic Reading Room, in a space between its walls and the stone shell designed by Foster. Providing a central space for meeting, exhibitions and activities as well as the central point of access for all departments' exhibition spaces, the Great Court was the physical embodiment of Wilson's programme to unite a diverse institution. The project's conceptualisation and development had been overseen, however, by Wilson's successor Robert Anderson (1992-2002). He was followed by Neil MacGregor (director from 2002 to 2015) who, many would argue, was the figure who made full use of the physical and intellectual space that had been opened up.

MacGregor sought to embed all of the Museum's activities within a central vision, neatly summarised in the phrase, 'A museum of the world, for the world' (British Museum 2006a). The phrase embraces two concepts. Firstly it provides an intellectual coherence to the

[18] The history was commissioned to coincide with the 250th anniversary of the BM in 2003.

Museum's seemingly diverse collections, activities and departments. The concept of a world collection and a world history could unite even the most apparently different disciplines and collections. Secondly the phrase provides a rationale for holding objects from different countries, explaining that they are available for anybody to study, and therefore it is a collection 'for the world'. This second concept had been used by the Trustees since 1984 as a response to debates over the ownership of certain objects (often acquired during the height of British imperialism), most prominently the Parthenon, or Elgin marbles, which many Greek people believe should be returned to Athens, where they were made. Explaining that the Museum's collection was available for 'international scholarship and the enjoyment of the general public' the Trustees' 1984 statement continued by demonstrating that this requirement was fulfilled by keeping the Museum open 'seven days a week, free of charge' (Report of the Trustees 1981-4, quoted in Wilson 2002: 323). While MacGregor's 'of the world, for the world' vision clearly owes a debt to this earlier argument, he enacted it with an ethos of generosity. The 1984 statement that the Museum building was open and free to all ignored the barriers that the majority of the world's population would face to popping into the building in Bloomsbury. Under MacGregor the Museum's international mandate instead focused on active engagement with professionals and the public all over the world. These included curatorial exchange and professional development programmes, and touring exhibitions of British Museum objects. MacGregor took the 'of the world, for the world' vision to its full extent in *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, a radio series, exhibition and book which brought together the BM's disciplines, collections and departments in formats which were accessible *(MacGregor 2011; Radio 4 and The British Museum 2010)*. It would be difficult to understate the impact of the *History of the World* project and of MacGregor's personality. On his retirement from the Museum he was celebrated in the national press not only for 'transform[ing] the institution', but also as 'a modern hero' and 'national treasure' (Christiansen 2015; Jones 2015; Prodger 2015).

David Francis has discussed how exhibitions at the BM changed during McGregor's leadership, noting two significant changes. Firstly the subject matter developed a resonance of often direct relevance to contemporary world affairs and questions being asked in today's societies (Francis 2015: 45-47). Secondly exhibitions developed to include multiple voices and opinions, challenging the notion of an authoritative curatorial voice and encouraging questioning and discussion, rather than imparting information (Francis 2015: 52-57). Exhibitions during this period included *Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World* (2011), which took place during

the British and American war in Afghanistan; *Hadrian: Empire and Conflict* (2008), which highlighted the impact of Hadrian's relationship with his lover Antinous on his reign; and *Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam* (2012), which included the pilgrimage stories of many diverse individuals and groups.

The final stages of the Ethnographic Department's return to the main site – the return of staff and offices – was completed in 2004. Prior to this a number of permanent galleries had been opened for the Department's collections under Mack. These comprised the Sainsbury Africa Galleries, the Mexican and North American Galleries, and the Wellcome Trust Gallery. The latter, sponsored by the Wellcome Trust, displayed objects from around the world, primarily on the theme of health and wellbeing (the Wellcome Trust Gallery is currently displaying a long-term exhibition, titled *Living and Dying*). These new galleries had thematic displays, which were historicising and centred on objects. Despite continued efforts throughout the period there was no permanent space for the Oceanic region (always described as the Pacific Gallery). A number of displays in *Living and Dying* concentrated on Pacific regions, and the Pacific was represented in the cross-departmental Enlightenment Room, but these were small spaces for collections from such a large and diverse area. For this reason, Australia was under-represented in the display. At the time that *Indigenous Australia* was being developed there were only nine Indigenous Australian objects on permanent display at the Museum.

In the years leading up to *Indigenous Australia* there were a number of research projects related to the British Museum's Indigenous Australian collection. These included PhD projects on the ongoing history of particular objects or encounters (Clark 2013; Coates 1999) and how they had been displayed (Russell 2001b). Much of this interest was initiated or encouraged by Lissant Bolton, Head of Oceanic section and later Keeper of the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas. Bolton also supervised the continuing research and documentation of the collection as a whole. In 2007 Ian Coates conducted detailed archival research during a curatorial exchange from the National Museum of Australia (NMA), Canberra. This was supported by an effort to update thousands of object records with detailed information and digital images, which were made available online.[19]

[19] This documentation drive took the form of a number of formal and informal projects. These included a Getty Funded Project, which catalogued the wider Oceanic photography collection and a project to photograph thousands of Australian objects, undertaken by Ben Burt (AOA) and a number of volunteers. Prior to becoming the Project Curator on *Indigenous Australia* I worked as a volunteer on this project during 2013 and 2014.

Prior to these activities the historical importance of the Indigenous Australian collection had often been unrecognised or underappreciated outside of the Museum. This is illustrated by the example of the bark shield from Botany Bay which is now considered an object of historic significance for the BM (MacGregor 2011: 490). The shield is believed to have been collected by Cook during his first landing in Australia in April 1770. Some have traced its collection to a violent encounter, recorded in the journals of Cook, Banks and Parkinson (Beaglehole 1963: 54; 1967: entry for April 29th, 1770; Parkinson 1984: 134). 'Two Gweagal men approach the party and gesticulate with spears, Cook orders shots to be fired' (see Nugent 2009 for a detailed examination of the week Cook spent in Botany Bay). As Cook's landing heralded the British settlement of Australia, the shield has become symbolic of the subsequent history of encounters between British colonists and Indigenous Australians. Despite this the shield had received little attention before the early 2000s. It was not mentioned, for example, in the 2000 *British Museum A-Z companion* (Caygill 2000). In 2004 the shield was displayed in the Museum in the newly refurbished Kings Library, which had been re-presented as the Enlightenment Gallery from 2004. It was later used as a source for interrogating the first encounter between Cook and the Gwegal people of Botany Bay (Nugent 2009) and for investigating its creation, possible trade, and the materials used in its construction (Attenbrow and Cartwright 2014). The bark shield only came to wider public attention when Neil Macgregor included it in all of the incarnations of *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (MacGregor 2011; 2010).

The bark shield is a unique object, with a unique journey from near obscurity to being one of the Museum's star objects. It is also, however, representative of the wider Indigenous Australian collection at the BM, and of the changing attitudes towards it. Many of the objects in the collection date, like the shield, to the earliest encounters between Indigenous Australian and British peoples, but this has only been recognised relatively recently. The research revealed more information about the specific historical significance of the objects. A new value was accorded to the donations of nineteenth-century figures such as Mitchell and Jukes, and to Franks' talent for scavenging older collectors and befriending his contemporaries who travelled to the region. Not only are these objects rare, or sometimes unique, but like the bark shield, they often provide an Indigenous perspective to significant historical events. Even more recent acquisitions could be transformed with the benefit of hindsight. The bark and acrylic paintings acquired in the mid to late twentieth-century included works by men and women who are now viewed as revolutionary figures in Australia's art world and some of the country's most highly regarded artists (for example Tjangala).

The uniqueness of the early Australian material in the British Museum became apparent not only through research on Indigenous Australian history, but also through the rise of academic interest in museums and collecting, especially from the mid-1990s. The other major ethnographic museums of Europe, such as those in Paris and Berlin, do not have any Australian material from before 1850, a disparity that can be largely attributed to Britain's colonial links with Australia during this time. There is also no comparable collection in Australia. The first museum in Australia, the Australian Museum in Sydney, was only established in 1827 and subsequently lost the majority of its ethnographic collection in a fire in 1882, known as the Garden Palace fire (Peterson, Allen, and Hamby 2008: 25). Whilst some Australian museums have built collections of early material in the late twentieth-century (Peterson, Allen, and Hamby 2008: 2), the early dates of collection, acquisition and, where it exists, the accompanying documentation of the BM collection makes it unique.

The surge of interest in Australian collections within the Museum had a public front in the form of an Australian Season, which ran from April to October 2011. The main features of the season were three exhibitions or displays. *Australia Landscape*, facilitated by the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, was a garden in the forecourt of the Museum, consisting of living, native flora and fauna. This was accompanied by two more traditional object exhibitions: *Out of Australia: prints and drawings from Sidney Nolan to Rover Thomas* and *Baskets and Belonging: Indigenous Australian Histories* (Bolton 2011; Coppel and Caruana 2011). Both exhibitions consisted entirely of British Museum collections, the former from the Prints and Drawings Department and the latter from AOA. The two object exhibitions also reflected the changing attitudes towards practices of collecting, and towards the categorisation and role of Indigenous Australian collections at the Museum that had developed during the Museum of Mankind years. They celebrated contemporary art, broke down polarising categories such as traditional and modern, and historicised their topics. *Out of Australia* showcased a wide range of Indigenous Australian works from the 1980s onwards. Included within the wider print collection, they took their place within the history of Australian printmaking told in the exhibition. *Baskets and Belonging: Indigenous Australian Histories* 26 May-11 September 2011), an exhibition of basketry from across Aboriginal Australia and the Torres Strait, also included contemporary works (see Bolton 2011). The central themes of the exhibition were the diversity of basketry across the region, as well as the relationship of basketry to identity, kin relationships and

religion. Much of the material was historic however, and reference was made to the specific histories of individual baskets, if only though the inclusion of dates.

Conclusion

The BM's current Indigenous Australian collection is therefore the product, not only of a number of individual events, but also of changing attitudes towards Indigenous Australian objects and their value. Indigenous Australian materials shifted from being curiosities, to being objects of scientific value, to being ambassadors of culture and finally to being historical sources and even agents of change. This current emphasis on the historic value of the collection does not mean of course that it cannot still play other roles. In particular, as this thesis progresses, it will become clear that the values that emerged during the 1970s are still prominent. There continues to be a great emphasis on facilitating the meaningful involvement of traditional owners in the care and display of the collection and the objects remain a site of engagement between Indigenous Australian and British peoples.

3. Production

As the previous chapter illustrates the question of the roles of colonial era museum collections are more complex than they first appear. Historically, the UK's Indigenous Australian collections emerged not from a clear strategy, but from a complex intersection of personal, political, economic and ideological contexts, as well as the strong influence of chance. This complexity is also true of the much narrower context of a single exhibition. *Indigenous Australia* developed out of a number of aims and influences. One of these influences was the complex history of the British Museum Australia collection that has already been discussed. Another influence was the BM's mandate to entertain, to educate and to be financially viable. On a further level, like all exhibitions, *Indigenous Australia* emerged from the individual and particular; it was influenced by the individual objects and their histories and also by the diverse aims and opinions of a number of people (consider for example the role of curators, artists, designers, project managers and so on). This complex intersection of roles and influences not only makes it difficult to ascertain a well-defined set of aims for *Indigenous Australia*, but also to ascertain how these aims translated into the finished exhibition, and how responsible particular individuals and wider institutional strategies were in all of this. MacDonald refers to this as the 'authorial puzzle' of museum exhibitions (Macdonald 2002: 8).

I approach and simplify this authorial puzzle in two ways. Firstly, rather than studying the development of all aspects of the exhibition, I concentrate on areas which are specific to the central question of this thesis. In other words I focus on aims and understandings which were strongly related to the BM's Indigenous Australian collections and its ongoing legacies, rather than those which are relevant to all exhibitions. For this reason the chapter is structured around areas of the exhibition which were particularly relevant to the objects and the topic of the exhibition. After introducing the *Participants,* the chapter covers: research into BM collections prior to the exhibition development (*The research phase*); the development of the narrative (*Developing an outline*); consultation on content and narrative with British and Indigenous Australian communities (*Community consultation*); and the media campaign (*Public relations*) before concluding.[20] The second way in which I simplify the authorial puzzle is that I do not

[20] This does not mean that I disregard other areas of the exhibition, particularly interpretation and design. Sometimes these areas appear in this chapter when other areas touch on them. For example, I demonstrate how community consultation impacted on the exhibition text (which falls under interpretation). Mainly, however, these areas which could have been covered as part of 'production' are instead discussed in the next chapter, which analyses the finished exhibition. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, designers and interpretation

seek to build an explicit or fully coherent list of all participants' aims and then trace these aims through to the finished display. Instead I draw out the opinions and expectations of key groups and individuals and use these to identify common themes and understandings. I then use a number of case studies to consider how these different participants and their shared and individual opinions influenced each other and, ultimately, the content, narrative, and structure of the final display. This approach does not explain how every exhibit was formed, but instead provides an insight into the complexity and nuance of the exhibition process, while also drawing out broader, shared, understandings of the role of the exhibition and exploring how these understandings influenced the finished display.

Participants

Before discussing how *Indigenous Australia* developed it is necessary to introduce the key participants which appear in this chapter, and in the following two chapters of the case study. As I discuss in the Introduction to this thesis I follow Baxendall in breaking an exhibition into three groups of participants: exhibitors; makers (which Baxendall defines as the cultural group from which the objects originated); and visitors (Baxandall 1991). I also however problematize Baxendall's framework, by illustrating how the different categories overlap. This is particularly true of the first two groups, with makers frequently being involved in the production of exhibitions. For example, *Indigenous Australia* was led by Sculthorpe, an Indigenous Australian curator. Under Baxendall's framework Sculthorpe was, therefore, both a maker and an exhibitor. The categories are therefore easily disrupted.

Owing to this cross-over between the categories this case study does not distinguish between exhibitors and makers in Baxendale's broad definition of the term maker as a person with a cultural, or ancestral link to the material. To do so would be to play down the very different individual roles and activities of those who was involved in the exhibition. I do not however, ignore the distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in the exhibition. These two groups have vastly different historical and lived experiences, and relationships to the

professionals have a number of complex aims, of which the topic of the exhibition is often only a small part. Secondly these areas of the exhibition development were neither available to the public, nor part of my original research (excepting evaluation documents which I was granted permission to use). Rather than evaluate the process of these activities, therefore, I analyse the finished product as part of my reading of the exhibition as text.

material and these aspects are discussed in text when they become relevant in the broader analysis of participants' opinions and experiences. Participants are described instead using four categories which reflect their main roles in the exhibition, rather than whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous, Australian or British. These categories are: exhibitors, community consultants, artists, and audiences. Within these categories are further subdivisions based on participants' involvement in the exhibition. All of the categories are introduced below.

Exhibitors

The first category referred to as 'the exhibitors', includes the curators and other museum professionals and advisors, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who were involved in researching and developing the exhibition. I divide the exhibitors into two groups. The first, the 'curatorial team' are the British Museum staff who were directly involved with the curatorial development of the *Indigenous Australia* exhibition (rather than other aspects of the exhibition production). These include Gaye Sculthorpe, the Curator and Section Head of Oceania, who was the lead curator of *Indigenous Australia*; Lissant Bolton, the Keeper of the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, and myself, the Project Curator for *Indigenous Australia*. The second group of exhibitors, are referred to as 'collaborators'. They were researchers and advisors who took part in official collaborations related to the *Indigenous Australia* exhibition. These collaborations were with two Australian institutions, the Australian National University (ANU) and the National Museum of Australia (NMA). The main individuals were: Howard Morphy, Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the ANU. Maria Nugent, Fellow in the Australian Centre for Indigenous History in the School of History at the ANU; John Carty, who at the time of the exhibition was a research associate at the NMA and ANU and is now Head of Anthropology at the South Australian Museum and Professor of Anthropology at the University of Adelaide. Ian Coates, Curator at the NMA Collections Development Unit. At the time of the exhibition he was co-lead curator on the Encounters project and a member of the *Engaging Objects* research team. Other individuals at these organisations included Mathew Trinca, Director of the NMA; Peter Yu, Chair of the NMA Indigenous Reference Group; and other members of this group.

Community consultants

The term 'community consultants' refers to communities and individuals who took part in official consultation processes around *Indigenous Australia* and associated activities. This

group is further divided into 'Indigenous Australian stakeholders' and 'UK communities'. The category of Indigenous Australian stakeholders' includes twenty-seven Indigenous Australian communities and many more individuals who took part in official consultation processes. In order to uphold the privacy of the participants and because this thesis was not one of the outcomes of the original process, I have not listed all of the individuals involved. Instead, in the section on community consultation below, I discuss the consultation process using material and records, including names of participants and communities, which have already been made public by the relevant individuals and institutions. The category of consultants and stakeholders also includes the many individuals, including academics and professionals who engaged with the exhibition in more informal discussions and correspondence. 'UK communities' refers to a small focus group of UK-based people (representing a potential audience) who took part in a formative evaluation of the proposed exhibition.

Artists

'Artists' refers to contemporary artists who engaged with *Indigenous Australia*. It does not include all of the living artists whose work featured in the final exhibition, focusing instead on those artists who engaged with the curatorial team directly and who produced work specifically for the exhibition or associated events. The artists who engaged the most with the exhibition were the six Indigenous Australian Artistic Fellows, who undertook residencies at the BM (*Chapter 4* which discusses these artists and their work in detail).

Audiences

Audiences are discussed in detail in *Chapter 5*.

The research phase

In 2007 Coates, curator at the National Museum of Australia (NMA) travelled to the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas at the British Museum (BM) as part of a curatorial exchange programme. Jenny Newell, his BM counterpart, went to Canberra. Coates researched the BM Indigenous Australian collection, supported by Bolton, who was, at the time, Curator and Head of the Oceanic section in the Department of AOA. Coates focused on the history and provenance of the material bringing together documents housed in different departments in the Museum in order to re-establish information on the collection that had been

lost (Sculthorpe 2017). Coates was not the only researcher working on the BM's Indigenous Australian material during this period, but his work had a particular impact. Combining a methodological and comprehensive approach to the material with his knowledge of Australia's colonial history Coates established compelling biographies of the objects. He demonstrated how deeply the history of the BM collection was intertwined with defining moments in the history of Australia. Many of the stories discussed in the previous chapter were brought to light or given detail and colour by this work. This detailed picture reinforced the view, long held by Coates and Bolton, that the BM's Australian collection had great historical significance. It also cemented the BM's reputation for holding some of the earliest artefacts from the Australian colonial era. It was during this time that serious discussion began about putting on an Indigenous Australian exhibition which would showcase the collection and its significance.

In the years between Coates' initial research and the *Indigenous Australia* exhibition there were a number of other research activities on the BM's Australian collection. Most significant of these was a major research project on the collections' role and meaning today. The project, titled *Engaging Objects: Indigenous communities, museum collections and the representations of history* (2011-2014), was designed as a collaboration between the BM, NMA and the Australian National University, Canberra (ANU). The team consisted of: Bolton from the BM; Coates and his colleague Michael Pickering from the NMA; and Howard Morphy, Maria Nugent and John Carty from the ANU. The project was funded by the Australian Research Council. As the title suggests the project focused on contemporary relationships between Indigenous Australians and the British Museum. The intention was both to facilitate engagements between Indigenous Australians and the BM, and to record and investigate these relationships and activities. As part of this the project funded a series of artists' residences, resulting in six Indigenous Australian Artistic Fellows spending time in the BM's collection and producing work that reflected on the experience. By facilitating these activities the *Engaging Objects* project aimed to interrogate contemporary dialogues around the difficult colonial era histories embedded in the BM collection (Australian National University 2015). In doing so the team aimed to reach broader understandings about Britain and Australia's shared history. As the text on the website explained: 'The central hypothesis of our project is that exploring the history of these objects, as a collaborative endeavour by museums and Indigenous communities, enables us to explore broader questions of history in Australia's cross-cultural present' (Australian National University 2015).

While the *Engaging Objects* research project had specific freestanding research outcomes, it was also designed to feed into two linked exhibitions of BM material. One would take place at in London at the BM and the other in Canberra at the NMA. Originally the Canberra exhibition was set to open first, but the schedule was eventually reversed, with *Indigenous Australia: Civilisation* opening in London in April 2015. The objects were then transported to Canberra for *Encounters: Revealing stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Objects from the British Museum*, which opened at the NMA in November 2015. The *Engaging Objects* project did not directly establish either exhibition, but was designed with the expectation that the exhibitions would take place. As Sculthorpe explained, 'the project envisaged the creation of two exhibitions relating to the research outcomes using objects in the British Museum's collections' (Sculthorpe 2017: 80). On the ground this relationship translated to the *Engaging Objects* project facilitating research and encounters and that were later central to both exhibitions. The *Engaging Objects* research team also provided advice throughout the development of the exhibition (National Museum of Australia 2015g; Sculthorpe 2017).

The *Engaging Objects* researchers were also tasked with recording the wider debates and activities around the two exhibitions (including their own involvement). They were particularly interested in the way that the BM's colonial history was understood and discussed today. They wondered whether the Museum's role in Britain's colonial history had become oversimplified, especially by the time it reached popular consciousness. They were concerned by the equation of broader hegemonic systems of British colonial institutions in Australia with the activities and motivations of the individuals involved in making museum collections. As Morphy, the principle investigator of *Engaging Objects* explains, this not only misrepresented many collectors' actions and opinions, but could also deny the agency of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants.

> The making of collections has always been entangled with the politics of the frontier, with the control of indigenous people, and until recently with the appropriation of their land. My aim… is not to deny that reality but to offer a more nuanced account, which draws attention to the agency of Indigenous Australians and recognise that those who built the collections were often the most supportive of the Aboriginal causes.[21] (Morphy 2015a: 371)

[21] Morphy is writing here in relation to a different research project, but the statement expresses his broader sentiment about the narratives surrounding museums and colonialism.

These more nuanced histories of encounters between collectors and indigenous peoples are established in the wider literature on ethnographic collecting (see *Introduction*), but the Engaging Objects team saw a gap in the public dialogue around the British Museum's Indigenous Australian collection.

> The rhetoric around the [British Museum], particularly in terms of its Australian collections, requires more detailed and sustained engagement from Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices in Australia (Australian National University 2015).

One of the aims of the projects leading up to *Indigenous Australia* was, therefore, to establish a more nuanced understanding of the BM's collection in the light of its colonial history. In this context the research projects that anticipated *Indigenous Australia* were not only concerned with investigating the Museum's colonial history, but also with confronting simplistic understandings of this colonial past today.

On top of its involvement in these research projects, the NMA was also conducting its own research and consultation on the BM collection, largely in preparation for its upcoming *Encounters* exhibition. *Encounters* would display many of the same objects as *Indigenous Australia*, but had a different scope and narrative. The main focus of the NMA's own activities was in-depth engagement with Indigenous Australian communities with connections to the BM material. NMA staff worked with people from twenty-seven communities. These consultations involved bringing photographs and details of BM objects to Indigenous communities across Australia. The consultations were led by the NMA, but often involved researchers from the other, associated research projects. The aims of the *Encounters* consultations were to consult on peoples' opinions and expectations for the two exhibitions, record participants knowledge and stories of objects and to provide communities with information about material in the BM (National Museum of Australia 2015b). The researchers were also keen to open a dialogue about the holding of Indigenous Australian material in the BM. The consultations resulted in large quantities of footage and notes (National Museum of Australia 2015b). Together with the *Engaging Objects* project *Encounters* provided contemporary knowledge, stories and opinions on the BM collection to complement Coates' initial historical research.

In many ways the various research projects that led up to *Indigenous Australia* are more complex on the page than they were in reality. Reviewing my notes and material on these projects it was often difficult to pinpoint exactly which research titles, funders and institutions corresponded to which event. This was largely because all of these projects and activities

involved the same relatively small group of people working on the same material (the British Museum collection) in preparation for the two related exhibitions. To separate out the activities into research projects can present false distinctions and mask broader themes, particularly when thinking about the aims of the projects and how these aims fed into the final exhibition. It is more productive therefore to consider the various projects and events as a broad research environment. When they are considered collectively it becomes apparent that the activities which led to the Indigenous Australia exhibition were underpinned by three broad aims. These aims were not explicitly stated as collective goals, but one or more of them are central in every research activity described above. They were: (1) to research the history of the BM Australian collection and how this fits within the wider colonial history of Britain and Australia; (2) to facilitate meaningful and constructive engagement between the BM and Indigenous Australian communities; (3) to record and analyse the contemporary role of the BM and, therefore, for participants to reflexively analyse their own involvement in the project.

As the aims and activities of the research projects, particularly these three central aims, proved so crucial to the development of *Indigenous Australia*, it is worth considering them in more detail. In hindsight these activities are an obvious route for preparation of an exhibition on Indigenous Australia. It appears natural that an exhibition on the topic would review and research the history of the material, engage contemporary stakeholders and reflect on the exhibition process. A review of UK Indigenous Australian collections and exhibitions reveals, however, that these activities were recent innovations in the curatorial process and that the scale and depth to which they were conducted for *Indigenous Australia* was unprecedented. Surprisingly the first activity, the archival and historical research, was the most exceptional. Excluding exhibitions that focused on Cook and the First Fleet, no major UK exhibition had provided a historical viewpoint of Indigenous Australia. Previous exhibitions had, by and large, either consisted of ahistorical displays dedicated to Indigenous Australian ways of life (often situated in a timeless ethnographic past or present), or they focused on the aesthetic qualities of works. Exhibitions in the former category include the BM's only other major Indigenous Australia exhibition, *Aborigines* (June 1972- February 1982) which contained only a passing mention of Australia's colonial history (British Museum AOA Exhibition Archive ; Cranstone 1973: 11-12). Exhibitions in the latter category include *Australia* at the RA (see *Chapter 1* and also *Appendix 1* for a list of key UK exhibitions on Indigenous Australian material). Correspondingly, no previous exhibitions had involved detailed research on the history of UK Indigenous Australian collections. The *Indigenous Australia* research projects were breaking

new ground both by researching these histories and by anticipating an exhibition dedicated to them.

The second research activity, engaging with Indigenous Australian communities, also placed *Indigenous Australia* within a relatively new model for UK exhibitions. Even as late as the 1980s there is little evidence of British museums engaging with contemporary Indigenous Australian communities. The archive for *Aborigines*, for example, contains no reference to any form of consultation with contemporary Indigenous Australian communities (British Museum AOA Exhibition Archive). It is only in recent decades that UK ethnographic museums, particularly the MAA, PRM, and the BM, have developed and maintained significant relationships with Indigenous Australian communities and used these relationships to inform exhibitions (for descriptions and discussions of these activities see Clark 2013, 2014; Herle 2003; 2005: 50-51; Herle and Philp 1998; Morton 2015; Raymond and Salmond 2008). The research projects for *Indigenous Australia* developed the scope and depth of this form of engagement to an unprecedented level for a UK exhibition with a programme that involved twenty-seven communities and many more individuals. Similarly, it is only in the last few decades that museum professionals have engaged in the third research theme and reflected on their own roles, and their institutions' roles in collecting and displaying Indigenous Australian material (Herle and Philp 1998; Morton 2015). The BM *Indigenous Australia* exhibition again took this research activity to a high level by including a large research project (*Engaging Objects*) partly dedicated to interrogating the exhibition as it developed.

The research aims that underpinned *Indigenous Australia* were, therefore, part of relatively recent changes in the ways that museums have developed exhibitions on the topic. While the exhibition clearly trod in the footsteps of recent projects in the MAA and PRM, it represented a dramatic change from the *Aborigines* exhibition thirty years earlier. The emphasis on historical research and contemporary engagement with communities were particularly striking changes. Furthermore, the *Indigenous Australia* research projects often developed these new approaches to an unprecedented level. When it becomes clear that these activities were not an inherent or well-established way to study Indigenous Australian collections and exhibitions, but emerged as a relatively recent and dramatic change, it raises an interesting question – why did these particular activities become so important? Looking back over forty years of literature on Indigenous Australia collections and ethnographic collections more generally it becomes clear that there were a number of influential critiques of ethnographic museums during this time. The

critiques centred on the realisation that ethnographic museums had played a role in the colonial projects of the West and furthermore, could continue to perpetuate and legitimise colonial acts and institutions. There was also a change in the wider discipline of anthropology. These critiques ultimately led museums to change their practices. Each of the three central research aims for Indigenous Australia relates directly to specific areas of these critiques. Understanding how these debates relate to the *Indigenous Australia* research projects demonstrates that, in many ways, those working on the exhibition understood it as a response to the colonial past and a way to address the ongoing consequences of this history.

The first research aim, the focus on colonial histories of the collection, responds to a number of criticisms of the ways that museums represented the history of non-Western peoples. The most acute of these observations was that museums often simply did not recognise the post-colonisation history of non-Western peoples, particularly indigenous peoples, at all. Clifford, who was particularly influential in promoting changes in ethnographic museums in the 1980s and 1990s, explained how, by ignoring historical events and the changes that came with them, museums could perpetuate prejudices about indigenous peoples (Clifford 1988). He described how ethnographic displays, such as the Hall of Pacific Peoples at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), New York, marginalised objects and narratives which '[suggest] change and syncretism' (Clifford 1988: 201). In doing so, Clifford argued, these museums delegitimised the contemporary lives of indigenous peoples and promoted ideas that were 'no longer credible', such as the notion that indigenous populations disappeared or became diminished after encounters with European colonists (Clifford 1988: 202). Price argued that these representations were still in force in her 2006 critical review of the MQB, writing that it largely ignored the histories of the cultural groups on display, and perpetuated the problematic connotations of the 'ethnographic present' (Price 2007: 174). By focusing so closely on the history of the collection, and researching the many histories that had been lost, the *Indigenous Australia* research projects were, on one level, responding to these criticisms.

In focusing on the colonial era stories behind the collections, the *Indigenous Australia* research projects also responded to critiques that contemporary museums can not only ignore, but also deny difficult colonial histories (Dubin 1999: see especially pp. 18-63), or legitimise the violence and prejudice that was inherent in these histories (Bann 1989; Bhabha 1992; Russell 2001). Homi Bhabha's dissection of an exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, 'Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration', demonstrates how the violence and disruption

wrought by colonial activities can be ignored in exhibits which are selective in their historical gaze (also see Bann 1989; Bhabha 1992: 86-7). Others have argued that by ignoring these difficult histories exhibitions can undermine the contemporary experiences and rights of contemporary indigenous peoples (Attwood 2015: 67; Russell 2001: 54-56).

The two other central aims of the Indigenous Australia research projects also relate to ongoing debates around museums' role in relation to the colonial legacy that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. By engaging with Indigenous Australian communities (the second aim) and considering their own roles as academics and curators (the third aim) the researchers addressed concerns that museums have often ignored indigenous voices and implied that only Western curators can interpret and appreciate non-Western objects (Ames 1992: 6; Coombes and Lloyd 1986: 542). Furthermore, the community consultation responded to well established evidence that dialogues between museums and indigenous communities can be beneficial for communities as well as museums. As Phillips explains 'collections-based research and the sharing of its results with communities is itself a form of repatriation'(Phillips 2005: 94). Collaborative research projects can restore knowledge about the material and associated histories that can have valuable local currency for community members. Phillips provides the example of Canadian museums working with Haida to establish knowledge of lineages, which is 'highly important to the Haida system of …inherited privilege' (Phillips 2005: 94). Working with museums can also have practical and financial benefits for communities, the cultural capital of large national museums can help communities associated with them to gain support and funding for other projects they may wish to undertake. These benefits were advocated by indigenous individuals and communities who fought for direct involvement in caring for and displaying their history and material (Ames 1992: 80-83). In engaging so directly and in such a sustained way with Indigenous Australian communities the Indigenous Australia research projects reflected the ideas that museums could work with indigenous peoples in ways that could avoid discrimination and actively benefit indigenous communities.

The research aims and activities that initially appeared to be quite normal for a museum were therefore the result of recent changes in understandings of what museums' role is in relation to their indigenous collections. As the critiques above illustrate, ethnographic collections and displays are now identified as sites that can perpetuate prejudices, legitimise the violence of the colonial era and continue discrimination against indigenous peoples. Crucially these critiques also suggest that by changing these practices museums can challenge contemporary prejudices

and aid indigenous communities in achieving a variety of goals for the future. In this respect these critiques suggest that museums can actively change the legacies of the colonial era. The *Indigenous Australia* research projects responded to this particular contemporary mandate for museums to address aspects of the colonial past and its ongoing consequences. This would be achieved through the three underlying activities: researching and presenting the history of the BM Australian collection and how this fits within the wider colonial history of Britain and Australia; facilitating meaningful involvement and engagement of Indigenous Australian communities; and recording and analysing the role of museums and professionals today. The *Indigenous Australia* research projects did not therefore simply provide knowledge and resources for the exhibition. They also situated the early stages of exhibition research and development within a deeper contemporary dialogue, or even mandate, to address the colonial legacy.

Developing an outline

While the BM exhibition on Indigenous Australia had been anticipated by the research projects for a number of years, the detailed plan for the exhibition began development relatively late. Gaye Sculthorpe, the Lead Curator, arrived at the British Museum only two years before the exhibition opened. Sculthorpe was appointed Oceanic Curator and Head of the Oceanic section at the BM in May 2013 and described developing the exhibition as one of her 'immediate tasks' (Sculthorpe 2017). Sculthorpe had trained as a historian and was Director of the Indigenous Cultures Program at Museum Victoria, Melbourne, before taking on a role mediating Native Title (land rights) agreements as a Member of the National Native Title Tribunal. This provided her with a professional background which touched on aspects of all of the research projects; she had the historical subject knowledge and research skills, as well as recent experience of facilitating engagements between Indigenous traditional owners and mainly non-Indigenous organisations. Sculthorpe conducted her own detailed research into the BM collection and proposed an Indigenous Australia exhibition that utilised this research as well as the documents, histories and relationships established through the various research projects.

The exhibition that Sculthorpe proposed was to be firmly based on the BM collection, with a ratio of around 80-90% BM objects to 10-20% loan objects. It would take a narrative approach, following the style of British Museum exhibitions since the early 2000 (Francis 2015 also see

Chapter 2). The exhibition would introduce Indigenous Australian lives and ontologies to the audience in the UK. It would also present the colonial history of Australia. Importantly, this history would give voice to stories of violence and massive disruption caused by British colonisation, as Sculthorpe reflected after the exhibition, she felt strongly that 'painful histories were not to be ignored' (Sculthorpe 2017: 80). There were five proposed sections:

Section one: Introduction, would present key information on Indigenous Australia. These would be the diversity of the Australian continent and the number of different Indigenous groups that live there and the length Indigenous Australian history on the continent, 'over 55,000 years'[22] (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 11).

Section two: Understanding Country: 'a walk through country', would describe Indigenous Australian's relationship to 'country'. In doing so it would introduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders religions, technologies, and arts.

Section three: Encounters in Country: 'a walk through history', would take a chronological approach to the history of Australia since the encounter between Gwegal people and James Cook and his men at Botany Bay in 1770.

Section four: Out of Country: 'stories of collections' would consider how Indigenous Australian material was collected and brought to the UK. It would tell complex and diverse stories of collecting and consider different contemporary Indigenous Australian opinions on the BM's collections.

Section five: Endnote: Drawing on the Past would focus on the ways in which contemporary Indigenous Australian artists use museum collections in their work.
(These five sections are described in Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014)

In its focus on these particular themes and narratives the initial outline for the exhibition drew on the knowledge and relationships that came out of the research projects discussed above. It also had strong echoes of these projects' three underlying aims: it would represent and discuss the difficult colonial histories of Australia (aim 1); it would be developed with the involvement of Indigenous Australian communities and use their voices and stories (aim 2); it would

[22] This number was to change to 60,000 later in the development to reflect recent archaeological investigations.

consider the role of the BM, both historic and ongoing (aim 3). The initial proposal for an Indigenous Australian exhibition was approved by a panel of BM staff in late 2013/ early 2014 (Sculthorpe 2017).

It was also around this time that the final title, *Indigenous Australia: enduring civilisation* and the objects for the poster were approved.[23] The title was coined by Bolton, and reflects two aspects of Indigenous Australian history (Morphy 2015b: 7). The first is that Indigenous Australian civilisation has endured for such a long time. The second half described how Indigenous Australian's endured Western concepts of 'civilisation' in the form of British colonisation. The poster portrayed two objects against a black background and bright pink text (fig. 15). The objects were a turtle-shell mask from Erub in the Torres Strait which would have been used in men's dances (fig. 16; object ref. 8) and an acrylic painting, *Kungkarangkalpa*, a collaborate painting by a group of senior women: Kunmanara Hogan, Tjaruwa Woods, Yarangka Thomas, Estelle Hogan, Ngalpingka Simms and Myrtle Pennington (Spinifex people) (fig. 17; object ref. 162). These two objects were not only visually striking, they provided a complement to each other; they represented the Torres Strait and Aboriginal Australia (the two groups of Indigenous Australian peoples), and men's and women's art forms.

Community consultation

The initial broad outline for Indigenous Australia was very close to the structure of the final completed exhibition (see the description in the next chapter). This outline stage was followed by more detailed development of the specific details of content, narrative and layout. This is the stage in an exhibition where decisions are made on which stories to tell and which objects to display. It was in this stage of the production of *Indigenous Australia* that the community consultation had a clear impact, which was traceable in the finished display. The community consultation involved two processes; there was a sustained engagement with a number of Indigenous Australian communities, as well as a smaller consultation with a UK focus group of potential audience members. This section describes the process of engaging with both of these groups and considers the aims and understandings of people within these groups and how these groups influenced the final display. This section does not, however, consider the

[23] There is a discussion of the meaning of the title in the Introduction to this thesis.

experiences of community members in isolation. Instead it considers the consultations as sites of encounter between community members and museum staff and traces how these encounters had a transformative impact on the final display (in viewing the exhibition in this way I follow an established critical approach to exhibitions of Oceanic material, this is outlined in depth in *Chapter 1 Introduction*).

Owing to the number of people and events involved this section does not describe every community consultation, instead it provides examples that illustrate the range and diversity of views held by community members, and of the transformative potential of the encounters. This section is split into two parts, the first covers consultations with Indigenous Australian stakeholders and the second part the consultation with a UK audience.

Indigenous Australian stakeholders

Over thirty Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities were engaged in the consultation process for *Indigenous Australia*, a figure which does not include the many people who engaged in informal discussions with BM staff, or the many Indigenous Australian academics and professionals who provided advice and expertise. The formal engagements were facilitated by three separate organisations, the BM, the NMA, and the ANU. They operated under a number of different, but interlinked projects, including the *Engaging Objects* project and the NMA's *Encounters* project discussed above. While all of these consulted with communities on the topic of the British Museum collection, different projects had their own distinct process and funders. It is worth noting, for example, that the largest and most sustained consultation process, which fell under the banner of the NMA's Encounters project, was led by NMA staff with the central aim of informing the NMA Encounters exhibition, rather than the BM exhibition (National Museum of Australia 2015a). These distinctions should not be overstated as all of the consultations shared the common broader aims of facilitating the consent and involvement of Indigenous Australian stakeholders. In particular both museums wanted to obtain specific consent for the display of certain objects from the BM collection. The consultations also provided the opportunity for all parties to share knowledge and histories related to the BM collections.

The distinctions between the projects do, however, illustrate that not all of the consultations were organised by the BM or took place with the direct involvement of BM staff. In terms of understanding the impact of these encounters on the *Indigenous Australia* exhibition this distinction between direct and indirect engagement is important for two reasons. Firstly direct encounters provide greater potential for parties to influence each other and so were more likely to have a greater influence on the exhibition. Secondly the decision over whether to consult directly or indirectly with a community or individual provides a good indication of the importance of the encounter in the opinion of BM staff. In terms of understanding the consultations and the impact they had on the *Indigenous Australia* exhibition, it is valuable, therefore, to think of the consultations in two tiers: the lower tier (1) encounters were indirect encounters between BM staff and communities, in that they were encounters between community members and the NMA and ANU, which were then fed back to the BM. These tier one encounters included more individual community members. The higher tier, (2) were direct encounters between community members and BM staff. These consultations concentrated on topics that were directly related to the BM *Indigenous Australia* exhibition. The community members could also be involved in the tier two consultations, but there were fewer participants than in the tier one consultations. In order to understand the aims of the participants and the impact of these encounters on *Indigenous Australia* it is necessary to first understand how each tier worked in practice.

Most of the tier one encounters were part of the NMA Encounters project that is described above. These consultations were an astonishingly large undertaking, taking the form of at least two visits by NMA staff members to twenty-seven separate communities (National Museum of Australia 2015b). This represents hundreds of hours of communication and a significant logistical feat, involving repeat journeys to remote locations across Australia. Each of these visits included a recorded discussion between the various parties. This resulted in hundreds of hours of films, which were sent, unedited, to the BM on a series of hard-drives (edited versions of many of the interviews were available, at the time of writing, on the NMA website). The footage reveals that most of these consultations took the form of discussions about objects in the BM collection. The objects were presented in extensive A4 spiral bound books, which contained images and information (fig.18). Participants also discussed their opinions on museums and museum collections of Indigenous Australian material, particularly the BM. Many people also shared personal stories and reflected on their communities and identity. As well as formal interviews there was also footage of people giving tours of their country,

demonstrating knowledge and skills (such as fishing and painting, see fig. 19), and more general location shots of the different landscapes where the consultations took place. While the consultation process was formal in the sense that it had a set format and organisational process, many of the films have a relaxed and intimate tone, taking the form of conversational discussions in the homes of the hosts.

The tier two encounters did not have the formal structure of the NMA consultation. The BM took a pragmatic approach, adapting encounters depending on the situation. These included face-to-face meetings conducted when BM staff visited Australia or when Indigenous Australian stakeholders visited the BM. Engagements also included conversations via phone and Skype, emails and letters. The BM approach included general discussions on the exhibition as well as, crucially, obtaining specific permission for the inclusion of particular objects in the display. There were also many discussions on the use of text and contextual images and films. The BM's pragmatic approach was a reflection of the particular history of the material as well as the number of communities involved (Sculthorpe 2017). Limited by distance and finances, staff worked to tailor consultations according to the importance of the material and the wishes of the communities. On the ground this meant that some consultations were, in many ways, executed quite simply, while others were more complex. For example, requesting permission to display a contemporary photograph from a public event or activity was a simple process of tracing the copyright holder and other parties involved (such as the people in the photograph) and organising permissions. This was often achieved through email conversations. When consulting on restricted knowledge and objects the consultations could be more complex and usually had to be achieved through more nuanced methods, such as phone calls and face-to-face meetings. Material which fell into this category included a two-meter-long crocodile mask, made of turtle-shell on Mabuiag Island in the Torres Strait (fig. 20; object ref. 93). The consultation was important enough that BM staff made direct visits to the community involved.[24]

Community members expressed a number of aims for their involvement with the consultation process and the BM exhibition. As they participated, it can be assumed that community stakeholders shared the broad hope of staff members that they would have a meaningful engagement in the exhibition process. In terms of their specific hopes for the exhibition many participants wanted to promote understanding of Indigenous Australian histories, knowledge

[24] Community members have asked for the details of these discussions not to be disclosed.

and ways of living. 'What would I want to say to people looking at the shield?' asked Stan Grant, a Wiradjuri elder from Victoria, 'Respect it. Respect everything you see there and make sure that you understand all about it. You read what you can about it, but most of all respect it. Yindyamarra is our word respect and that's what we have to pay respect to the shield and all the artefacts that are in the museum' (National Museum of Australia 2015j). Buly Saylor, an Elder from Erub Island explained that he wanted people to see the value of life in the Torres Strait 'I want them to think that we people on the Island here… it's like… we have a better way to live… we you know… share' he said (National Museum of Australia 2015k). Saylor also wanted to dispel prejudices explaining that 'during the war, when the war ship had come up here' some of the soldiers had 'thought… people were cannibal… when they come they find out we sociable… make good friend… next time they come they bring presents' (National Museum of Australia 2015k). Many stakeholders expressed similar hopes that the exhibition would counteract damaging representations of the past. It was an aim that resonates with the aims of staff on the *Indigenous Australia* research projects discussed above.

Community stakeholders also wanted the exhibition to show the difficult histories of British imperialism in Australia, another aim that resonates with those of research staff. Participants wanted the exhibition to use Indigenous histories and voices to do this. 'It is nice to have an Aboriginal perspective, and our oral histories that we know' said Fiona Maher, a Tasmanian Aboriginal artist from Cape Barren Island (National Museum of Australia 2015l). Many expressed the hope that by showing these difficult histories there would be greater understanding of Indigenous Australian communities, which would, in turn, lead to action on contemporary issues. Luke Morcom, a Yanyuwa man from the Rrumburriya clan, explained, 'this is what I want people, when they look at this exhibition, to think, wow, there was something here and we came along and we destroyed it. Now if we're not careful, if we don't do something about it, it will be gone forever' (National Museum of Australia 2015c). Similarly June Oscar, a Bunuba woman who works in Fitzroy Crossing described both exhibitions as an opportunity for people on both sides of the stories to reflect on their roles in a way that would lead to changes in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, saying 'there is that element of righting the wrongs between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia' (National Museum of Australia 2015h).

Another aim for both community members and research staff was to discuss the holding of Indigenous Australian materials in the BM and other museums. Most of the tier one

consultations included a discussion of this topic as one of the questions that NMA Encounters interviewers asked stakeholders was how they felt about the objects being in museums. These conversations were often followed up in tier two consultations. Stakeholders expressed a number of opinions. Some explicitly stated that they wanted material in the BM to be returned to Australia. 'They're mine, they're my community's… we should have the opportunity to handle those things…' said Theresa Sainty, a Pakana woman from Tasmania (National Museum of Australia 2015d). Stakeholders who called for material to be returned often cited its importance for the younger generation. Gibson Farmer Illortamini from Pirlangimpi in the Tiwi Islands explained 'we gonna bring them back to their rightful place so the kids and grandkids can look' (National Museum of Australia 2015m). Other stakeholders approached the current location of the material with pragmatism. Kay Mundraby, a Mandingalbay Traditional Owner, based in Yarrabah, north Queensland explained:

> Yeah, well that's what a museum is about eh, to have everything in there permanently [laughs]. …you know it's got to be there for visitors and tourists to see and for the Aboriginal people and all the people to see. Because mainly it's tourists go through those places as well. But if it's, you know, in a place where it's accessible to people to get to, that would be good. Even just to feel it and touch it. (National Museum of Australia 2015f)

Some people acknowledged the role of museums in preserving Indigenous Australian material. Lynette Knapp, a Menang women from Albany explained 'I'm forever thankful …that someone cared enough to place them somewhere, especially Dr Collie [Alexander Collie who collected a lot of the material]… and we're pretty thankful to the British Museum, but it has to go home' (National Museum of Australia 2015e). Shayne Williams, a prominent academic and educator from La Perouse community said 'I'm sort of grateful that they were taken and preserved' (National Museum of Australia 2015i). Other stakeholders expressed firm wishes for material to remain in museums. Stan Grant explained 'What do I think about Aboriginal materials being in museums. I have no problem with it. I think if our kids are going to learn anything, it will help them to learn something, if they can go to a museum and learn. Marvellous stuff. I think that is wonderful' (National Museum of Australia 2015j). While opinions on the location of the objects differed, the conversations as a whole demonstrate the willingness on all sides to listen and engage in dialogue.

For much of the consultation process Indigenous stakeholders shared aims, understandings and expectations with the exhibitors. Both groups wanted to show the difficult histories of colonisation, to involve Indigenous Australians as much as possible and to be aware of the lasting impacts of the exhibition itself. There were also moments where aims did not align. As Thomas discusses in his article on researching Melanesian collections in the BM, indigenous participants in research projects may have their own particular aims and understandings of the process that have not been anticipated by museum staff (Thomas 2015). Thomas also notes, however, that these moments can be the most productive or illuminating. Raymond Silverman supports this observation in his introduction to a book of case studies of museums and communities, in which he explains that 'collaborative projects …often fail or fall short, but there is something special about these encounters and …they often yield significant, if unexpected outcomes' (Silverman 2015: 9). This is illustrated in Thomas' case study when Sam Luguna, an artist and school teacher, who was working as an indigenous advisor in the research project provided an unexpected interpretation of a group of shields laid out for his consideration. Rather than commenting on design or use, as the other researchers expected, he discussed contemporary fighting in his community (Thomas 2015: 256-259). This, Thomas writes provided information that the other professionals might not otherwise have considered relevant or useful knowledge for that collection (Thomas 2015: 259).

For *Indigenous Australia* an unexpected result of the consultation was that Indigenous stakeholders rarely offered clear advice or opinions on the exhibition content. This was particularly apparent during the consultations filmed by the NMA Encounters project, when interviewers asked stakeholders which objects from their community should feature in the exhibitions. The museum staff were presumably hoping for insight into community members' opinions on which objects were particularly interesting or special, illustrating, for example, important stories or concepts. Instead stakeholders rarely singled out any object as more special than any of the others and the majority of people requested far more objects than would be possible to display. Some even requested that all of the objects from their community be on display in both exhibitions, looking through the books and pointing at each object in turn, even when there were a large number of very similar objects. Those who made these requests were aware that this would not be achievable given the number of objects, the space allocated to the exhibitions and, in terms of the NMA exhibition, the resources required to transport them to Australia. For some the requests were perhaps a strategy to have as many objects as conceivable on display. For other stakeholders these conversations could have also been a way of more

tactfully, or indirectly, expressing a desire for greater access to the objects, or for them to be returned. These requests were most clearly, however, an expression of the deep value of all of the material for the Indigenous stakeholders who took part in the process. To have chosen just a few objects would have implied that others were not equally important. These moments illustrate that Indigenous stakeholders may not be interested in taking part in all aspects of an exhibition. By rarely offering comment the people who participated in the consultation sent the message that making difficult decisions over what to include in the display was the role of museum staff (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) rather than outside advisors.

The community consultations had clear influences on the final exhibition. The most obvious outcome was in decisions over which objects to display. BM staff listened carefully to feedback from both tier one and tier two consultations on which objects should be included in the exhibition and respected any concerns and requests. These more formal acts of permission to display objects were an important part of the process, but, often, they did not impact the exhibition as much as the more in-depth and nuanced dialogues. In other words, the issue of permission only dictated the absence or presence of a particular object. In contrast people's stories, histories and the deeper discussion and debates between BM staff (particularly Sculthorpe) and community members had the ability to influence the exhibition's tone, narrative and text. One example of this was in the display of the most well-known object in the exhibition, the shield, believed to have belonged to a Gweagal man, brought back to Britain on Cook's first voyage and now in the BM collection (figs. 5, 6). While the shield was already on permanent display at the BM, with consent of community members, staff continued to liaise about its temporary move and redisplay in *Indigenous Australia*. During these consultations staff members emailed Williams, the academic and educator from the La Perouse community, to discuss his views on the shield and its display in Indigenous Australia. Williams agreed that the shield should go into the exhibition, but he also engaged in a more detailed conversation over the shield, its history, and its display in London. Staff were struck by the arguments Williams put forward in this conversation and asked him if they could use some of the text in the exhibition. Williams agreed and a quote drawn from the email conversation was placed on the label for the shield, alongside the words of Cook (see *Chapter 4* for a full discussion of this exhibit). The final label text (located under the shield) read as follows:

Shield

This red mangrove shield represents the historic encounter between Aboriginal and British people at Botany Bay in 1770 that led to the establishment of a British penal colony in Australia and its ongoing legacy. It was probably collected by the naturalist Joseph Banks, or another of Cook's men after a skirmish on the beach.
Probably Botany Bay (Sydney), New South Wales, about 1770
British Museum

'Although some of the shots struck the man yet it had no other effect than to make him lay hold of a Shield to defend himself.'
James Cook, navigator, 1770

'At the end of the day, regardless where it came from, the shield is of national significance as a tangible Indigenous item that dates back to our foundational era.'
Shayne Williams, La Perouse community, Sydney, 2014[25]

The final label for the shield illustrates the transformative potential of individual consultants in the exhibition. The consultation process could have been a simple act of consent. Instead Williams' ability to engage BM staff in conversation, and his eloquence in explaining his position, influenced the final exhibition far more than a clear cut decision over whether to display the shield. The result was that Williams' voice became an explicit part of the exhibition. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the statement and the shield enhanced the message which Williams sought to convey when he agreed for it to be displayed. As he explained when he describes the shield as 'as a tangible Indigenous item that dates back to our foundational era', Williams considered the shield to be a valuable contribution to the exhibition because it provided an Indigenous perspective from this violent beginning to Britain and Australia's shared history. Placing Williams' words alongside the shield therefore added one Indigenous perspective to the display and illuminated another Indigenous perspective for the audience - that of the shield itself.

[25] This and all subsequent text cited from *Indigenous Australia* is an exact reproduction of the text as it appeared in the final exhibition and should be considered to be cited as: Exhibition text for (object or exhibition section panel cited). *Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation* 23 April – 2 August 2015. British Museum: London.

The consultation for the shield is just one example where community engagement influenced the final exhibition in deep ways. There were a number of instances where consultations with Indigenous stakeholders led to changes or additions in *Indigenous Australia*. One unexpected example of this was when the exhibition team were developing an introductory film for the exhibition. The concept was that the film would be an impressionistic introduction to the diverse landscapes of Australia and to Indigenous Australian peoples' close relationship to the land. Originally the team hoped to use footage from a well-known Australian documentary series, but this proved difficult to organise. While watching the unedited footage of the *Encounters* community consultations it became apparent that there was a large quantity of short, but stunning scenes of the diverse landscapes where the interviews had taken place (figs. 21, 22). The footage included many static shots of landscapes, in which only grass, trees or water moved. There was also footage of cities and towns and footage of people on their own country, walking across the land and pointing out features. It emerged that the NMA had hired an experienced film maker (Sarah Scragg) to record the interviews and she had taken these shots as contextual scenes to be used as introductions to the edited films that the NMA was planning to make from the interviews. Impressed by the quality of the footage, and its contemplative tone, staff at the BM decided to use this contextual footage to make an original film for the final display, rather than re-using existing footage. This resulted in a film, made by digital media design company Newangle, that still had the impressionistic, contemplative tone, the exhibition team were hoping for, but also portrayed many of the various communities whose objects were on display (fig. 23). As the film emerged as a direct result of the particular qualities of the scenes it was as if the participants, and the land itself, had a degree of agency in the process.

Alongside the unexpected influences, there were also some limitations to the consultation process as Sculthorpe later reflected, writing:

> Doing the exhibition at a great distance from where the objects originated, and related to over thirty communities spread from across Australia, it was not possible for British Museum staff to consult all communities in relation to every object included. In some instances, the provenance information was only of a general nature, making it difficult to identify a specific community (Sculthorpe 2017: 90).

As Sculthorpe explains it was not possible to consult on every item which was displayed. This was due both to a lack of information on the objects and to the fact that there were limited resources for extensive on the ground consultations. These sorts of limitations are unavoidable, no museum operates within the scope of bottomless timeframes and finances. Robin Boast

argues that there are other unavoidable limitations when museums work with communities, writing that there are inherent power imbalances as 'the institution that controls the calibration and use, controls the resource' (Boast 2011: 65). While these imbalances can be mitigated by close collaboration, mutual understanding and a sense of understanding and reflexivity on the part of museum staff, it is still worth acknowledging that imbalances exist. Others have demonstrated that acknowledging the structures of the museum is one of the factors that can work to mitigate power imbalances when working with communities (Peirson Jones 1992). In the case of *Indigenous Australia* it was inevitable that the institutions organising the consultations determined their format and structure. For example the decision to bring photographs and information on BM objects to individuals and communities and to base engagements around this was a decision made by staff at the institutions. Ultimately these decisions meant that the community consultation process was based around individual objects, rather than other aspects of the exhibition such as design or broader narratives. As Boast's summary illustrates, the position of the museum in these encounters means that these sorts of limitations can never be fully resolved.

Perhaps these limitations are one reason why some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders asserted their aims and opinions beyond the structures of the museum. This was particularly apparent in the debate over two Dja Dja Wurrung artefacts, an etching on bark and an emu figure, shaped from bark (figs. 24, 25). A group of Dja Dja Wurrung people requested the return of items.[26] They engaged in dialogue with the BM, but also raised these issues in the press, using the publicity surrounding the exhibition to increase awareness of their perspectives on repatriation (Daley 2015, 2016; Pilger 2015). In particular Gary Murray, a Dja Dja Wurrung man from Victoria spoke on a number of occasions about Dja Dja Wurrung requests to repatriate two barks originally from a place in his country, near Lake Boort in northern Victoria. Murray also liaised with a British activist group, Art Not Oil, who were protesting against the British Museum's sponsorship arrangement with the oil company BP. Art not Oil incorporated calls for the material to be returned into their protests. These protests, which took place at the BM, attracted attention from members of the public as well as further interest from the press (see *Chapter 5* for more on this). Murray's use of the media and the protest group demonstrates one exertion of power outside of the Museum structures. He and other Dja Dja Wurrung people also continued to liaise with the BM, particularly with Sculthorpe who maintained dialogues

[26] Subsequent to this the barks had been the subject of an extended legal battle in the Australian courts, after going on loan to Museum Victoria in Melbourne in 2004. A group of Dja Dja Wurrung tried to prevent the objects leaving Australia, but their claim was not upheld and they were returned to the BM (see Prott 2006).

with these stakeholders throughout the exhibition and beyond. These dialogues have begun to bear fruit, leading, in particular, to agreements to loan objects (Daley 2016).

UK Audiences

British Museum staff also consulted their local community in London. This consultation, termed the 'formative evaluation', was commissioned by the BM Marketing and Interpretation departments from Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (MHM). Describing themselves as a 'strategic research consultancy' MHM conduct research for a number of high profile cultural institutions in the UK, including the BM (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre c.2016: 2). The main ethos of the company is 'helping organisations develop enhanced consumer focus' Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, c.2016, p. 2). MHM use an audience profiling method, termed 'Culture Segments', to categorise potential visitors. Culture segments are designed primarily to aid with marketing, but can also contribute to the development of exhibitions, allowing the BM to, for example, establish which types of audience members an exhibition is targeting. *Indigenous Australia* targeted three Culture Segments, which had been identified as audiences who would be interested in the topics, 'Essence', 'Affirmation' and 'Expression' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 26). The Essence segment are described as 'well-educated professionals who are highly active cultural consumers' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 26). They will find out about exhibitions themselves and will actively visit museums for temporary exhibitions. The Affirmation segment are young adults, often families with children who have an 'adventurous' approach to 'arts and cultural consumption' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 27). They have broad interests 'as a means of developing themselves as individuals' so 'need reassurances that the experiences will be worthwhile' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 27). Expression segment people are 'fun loving' and 'creative and spiritual' and are attracted by 'inspirational learning opportunities' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 26). As they have a wide range of interests they respond to marketing which promotes 'new experiences' and a 'differentiated message' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 26). While all three of these audience groups were identified as people who may be particularly interested in the *Indigenous Australia* the formative evaluation focused on the Affirmation and Expression segments as these were the groups that were likely to respond to marketing.

The formative evaluation for *Indigenous Australia* took the form of a focus group of 15 participants, which took place on 4 March 2014. While participants were drawn from people

who were categorised as falling into the two target segments, the group included people from a range of backgrounds, in order to reflect the BM's diverse, international audience. The session consisted of an initial introduction to the exhibition, using proposed marketing materials, including images of key objects and proposed titles for the exhibition. This was followed by a presentation by Sculthorpe, who introduced the exhibition content and narrative in more depth. The session ended with an in depth discussion led by MHM researchers. Responses were recorded and submitted to the BM in a twenty-eight-page report (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014). The visitor sample was small and not designed to be a representative analysis of the whole potential audience. Instead, the qualitative format was designed to facilitate an in depth understanding of a sample audience's response to the proposed themes and content of the exhibition. The BM had three aims for the evaluation:

> - To establish visitors' level of knowledge and interest in an exhibition about Indigenous Australia at the British Museum.
> - To explore visitors' reactions to the proposed structure of the exhibition and the main themes which it explores.
> - To gather data to help inform the marketing for the exhibition and to help define the core audience for the exhibition.
> (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 28).

The focus group expressed a number of responses to the proposed exhibition. Overall there was a high level of interest in the topic. One participant requested 'A great deal of history about the indigenous tribes that we just don't know because it is not taught here. I think that would be very interesting' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 6). Many people felt, however, that the focus on the BM collection, rather than loan objects would be poor value for money (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 3-10). As one participant explained 'If they tell me they have brought them all up from Australia, that is one thing. If they tell me they have brought them up from the basement, that is another' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 9). Others were keen to see collections that were not normally on display. 'If it is in the collection, but we don't see it, I'm very happy [to go]. If we can only see 10% and the other 90% is brought out of storage, great, that gives us a chance to see it' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 9). For this reason the report recommended that the exhibition should explain and promote the fact that these collections had an important history and that many objects had rarely (if at all) been on display before.

In a more detailed discussion on the exhibition content and narrative, none of the focus group had much knowledge of Indigenous Australia. 'I don't know a lot about the history of Australia, but there are terms that I'd associate with it. So things like Aborigines, but I don't know a lot actually about them or their civilisation or any of that' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 3). The knowledge that people did have was limited and sometimes reflected problematic stereotypes. 'Oppressed, drunk, dreamtime, rock art, didgeridoos, faces painted' was one participant's response to the word 'Aborigine' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 7). Perhaps because of their lack of general knowledge participants were worried that the five sections of the exhibition covered too much ground. 'It's terribly broad isn't it' said one respondent referring to the fact that the exhibition covered a wide range of both cultural and historical information (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014). Owing to the lack of knowledge and the concerns about the amount of ground covered, MHM recommend providing a basic introduction to the topic, using graphics such as maps and timelines to convey certain concepts and taking care when using certain words and phrases such as 'country' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 7).

Unlike the Indigenous stakeholder consultation, the UK consultation was not designed to discuss broader issues of the colonial legacy, such as how the exhibition might influence relationships between Britain and Indigenous Australia. The aim of the UK consultation was, quite simply, to provide feedback on the exhibition, from the point of view of its consumers. The focus group did, however, discuss the representation of colonial history in the exhibition. Some respondents expressed the concern that the exhibition would be a 'guilt trip' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 7). 'I don't want to go and pay to have people tell me how awful I was or how poorly my country treated others' one respondent said (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 14). Others felt it was important to tell difficult histories, with one person explaining 'I think it would be good to put down some statistics, how many were killed, how many children were taken away, I think it would be shameful not to put that' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014: 17). While no one in the group thought that the exhibition should totally avoid the topic of colonial history, this topic was where the focus group differed the most from the Indigenous Australian stakeholders, who were overwhelmingly in favour of telling difficult histories.

The reactions of these focus group members did not change any of the difficult stories told in *Indigenous Australia* but did make museum staff aware that UK visitors would be sensitive of the ways these stories were told. These audiences reactions to the subject supports Macdonald's

assertion that representing difficult histories in (post)colonial countries is problematic for museums, because it disrupts audiences positive perception of the nation state as morally good (Macdonald 2009: 1). This can be profoundly disturbing, because these audiences identify themselves with the nation state (Attwood 2015: 61; Macdonald 2009: 1). The MHM report recommended that the exhibition address audiences' issues should concentrate on a 'factual' approach (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2014). In the finished exhibition this is evident to a careful avoidance of emotive language and a concentration on the specific details of particular stories. The approach and how it was received are discussed in *Chapter 4.* and *Chapter 5*.

The focus group's responses fed into the final exhibition in a number of other ways. The overall scope, content and narrative structure of the exhibition did not change, but there was an influence on the interpretation. For example, the MHM report emphasised the importance of going 'back to basics', by explaining terms, geographies and histories that would be general knowledge to an Australian audience (MHM 2014). This led to concepts and phrases such as 'country' being explained in the introductory section of the exhibition (fig. 26). Key information was also conveyed in simple visual forms, using photographs, maps and graphics. For example, a large map was use to convey the diversity of language groups within Australia (figs. 27, 28). The focus group findings also confirmed the views of researchers and Indigenous stakeholders that they would have to find ways to address certain prejudices and misunderstandings that visitors may have. One way in which the exhibition attempted to address this was by incorporating key themes throughout the whole exhibition. One of these themes was the celebration of contemporary Indigenous Australian experience, which would demonstrate diversity and counteract stereotypes. Again this theme was often conveyed using images as an immediate, visceral form of communication. For example one panel reproduced a photograph of Hamzah Taylor lighting a hunting fire near Parnngurr, Western Australia in 2010, and another a photograph of Farron Goery from Santa Teresa getting ready for a performance at the Mbantua Fesitival in Alice Springs in 2013 (figs. 29, 30). These photographs and similar images conveyed the ways in which practices such as land management and ceremonial dance, which were represented in the BMs historic collections, were also part of contemporary experiences.

Overall, it would be difficult to say that the focus group influenced the wider aims of the other participants in the exhibition production. The group took place after these aims had been established. Furthermore, in some cases, particularly around the display of difficult colonial

histories, the aims of some focus group members were in opposition to those of Indigenous stakeholders and exhibitions. It would more appropriate therefore, to characterise the involvement of the focus group, more as an aid to the development of already established aims. In particular, the results of the group led to the realisation among museum staff that the exhibition would have to work hard to increase understanding, and counteract prejudices, of contemporary Indigenous Australia and to present difficult histories in accurate, but non-confrontational ways.

The consultation process also provided an interesting insight into the British public's perception of the exhibition of museums' existing collections. The BM presented *Indigenous Australia* as an opportunity to encounter and re-evaluate an important collection. In contrast, the focus group considered it to be a bit of a swindle. They resented paying to see objects already in a public collection. This demonstrates the difficulty of conveying the value of activities such as research and conservation. Without these resource heavy activities audiences would not have the opportunity to encounter either the objects or the knowledge that *Indigenous Australia* presented.

Public relations

The broader aims or ethos of an exhibition are rarely an explicit part of the exhibition narrative and text. Like other creative forms an exhibition may be underpinned by certain ideologies (aesthetic, cultural, political and so on), which are not overtly articulated within the form itself. In many museums, press releases and interviews, and public documents and talks – particularly behind-the-scenes talks – have become a forum where the people who contributed to an exhibition can convey these broader understandings to the public. These arenas do not, like the other activities in this chapter, influence the finished display of an exhibition. Instead they allow contributors to articulate their understanding of an exhibition, its influences and ideologies, and its value and contribution to society. Interrogating the public presentation of *Indigenous Australia* provides therefore a further insight into participants' overall aims for the exhibition. More importantly, these presentations were often rare moments where widely shared aims and understandings of the exhibition were articulated, rather than remaining unintentionally un-verbalised and taken for granted as shared truths.

The most obvious message that contributors conveyed about the exhibition was that it was a seminal event. This was initially conveyed in discussions of the scale and scope of the exhibition and why it was a new approach to the topic. The first press release described *Indigenous Australia* as 'the first major exhibition in the UK to present a history of Indigenous Australia, both Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, through objects' (2015). By describing the exhibition as a 'first' the press release conformed to a typical format for major exhibitions. The language mirrored that of other major exhibitions of 2015, which were sold as new and unique experiences. For example, the Science Museum toured an early x-ray 'on display for the very first time'; an exhibition at the Tate was described as 'the UK's largest ever exhibition of Alexander Calder'; while the V&A showcased 'the first and largest retrospective' of Alexander McQueen's work 'to be presented in Europe'. The comparisons demonstrate that the description of Indigenous Australia as a 'first' followed a well-used formula for press releases. In many ways, however, the phrase was particularly appropriate, or even restrained, in light of the ways in which *Indigenous Australia* differed so dramatically from previous exhibitions on the topic and in light of the importance of *Indigenous Australia* for the people involved in its production.

The words and actions of many contributors were permeated by the understanding of *Indigenous Australia* as a seminal moment, not only breaking from the past, but also having the potential to instigate changes years into the future. These sentiments were often expressed personally with depth and emotion. MacGregor, speaking to press after the opening, described the exhibition as 'the first time it's been possible, for a public anywhere in Europe, to think about the story of Australia as told by Aboriginal objects' (Neill 2015). Sculthorpe also spoke of the exhibition as a 'first' before talking of her hope that the exhibition presented opportunities for future relationships with Indigenous Australian communities in her BM Member's lecture 'Indigenous Australia: the inside story' on 13 April 2015. The sentiment was made all the more powerful by her reference to her own connection to the exhibition in the form of a portrait of her great, great Grandmother, Tanganutara, which is in the BM collection and was on display in *Indigenous Australia* (object ref. 123). After the exhibition opened, Sculthorpe wrote in more depth about specific future projects between the BM, the NMA and the individuals and communities connected to the BM's collection (Sculthorpe 2015). She ended by noting that it was too early to tell whether the exhibition would have a wider role in addressing the 'many issues' raised in discussions on holding and displaying Indigenous Australian material, writing:

Indigenous Australia: enduring civilisation may or may not have changed the debate. Stay tuned' (Sculthorpe 2015: 26).

Discussions from the side of collaborators at the NMA and ANU were even more ambitious in their assessments of the exhibition's potential. Trinca told journalists that 'I think that it is going to be the most important work the [National Museum of Australia] does this decade, and arguably since its inception' (Neill 2015). Nugent suggested that *Indigenous Australia* could 'change how the conversation about relationships between Indigenous people, museums and collections is conducted' (Nugent 2015).For some of those involved the two exhibitions had potential far beyond the institutions, communities and individuals involved, by having an impact on wider relationships between the UK and Australia. In an article for *The Australian*, one of Australia's national papers, Peter Yu, the chair of the National Museum of Australia Indigenous Advisory Group, expressed this hope the most openly, writing:

> It is my hope that the British Museum and the National Museum of Australia, through the Indigenous Australia — Enduring Civilisation exhibition and the subsequent Encounters exhibition, will make a foundational contribution to understanding in both our countries about the richness of indigenous culture and the wider debate about healing the past (Yu 2015).

Taken on their own Yu's hopes for the exhibition seem extremely ambitious, but within the context of the wider discussions of the exhibition as an emotional and seminal moment, they appear as an extension, or more explicit rendering, of a sentiment that was widespread. For those involved in producing them the two exhibitions had potential far beyond the short time they were open.

As well as conveying the level of hope and ambition for the exhibition, public talks and documents allowed participants to describe some of the processes in more detail. In particular participants were keen to discuss the community consultation process. The consultation represented a significant relationship between the BM and Indigenous Australian communities and was, therefore, one of the reasons why so many contributors had such high expectations for the exhibition. It is, however, hard to convey the nuance and complexity of the dialogues with Indigenous communities, and the value of this to a wider audience, particularly within the limited scope of press releases and interviews. There is a danger that, without the knowledge of the time, effort and goodwill that went into the relationships, phrases such as 'community consultation' may appear tokenistic, particularly as the existence of community consultations

can be used to add legitimacy to a museum's activities. Jane Peirson Jones describes this effect in her account of developing a new anthropology exhibit in Birmingham Museum, where she explains that 'the existence of the advisory group certainly added validity to the project in political and professional circles' (Peirson Jones 1992: 225). This legitimising effect is not inherently negative. In fact, by listing it as one of many positive outcomes from the advisory process, Pierson Jones' description of the value of the activity becomes more honest and convincing. Her observation does however highlight the problematic nature of discussing museums' work with community stakeholders.

This was a problem that the public presentation of *Indigenous Australia* tried to address. The first press release, for example, discussed the collaborative processes in two places, with the three sentences dedicated to this topic representing a significant allocation of space in a document that had a very limited word allowance (these type of press releases are c.1000 words), already squeezed by the necessary mentions of sponsors, patrons and partners. Initially the statement provided a broad acknowledgement, which did not go into much depth:

> This exhibition has been developed in consultation with many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, Indigenous art and cultural centres across Australia (British Museum 2015).

Later, the statement provided more information on the role of the Encounters research project in facilitating relationships.

> The research project…involved staff from the National Museum of Australia and the British Museum visiting communities to discuss objects from the British Museum's collections… The project also brought contemporary Indigenous artists to London to view and respond to the Australian collections at the British Museum (British Museum 2015).

The description moves beyond a simple acknowledgement by mentioning a number of different encounters and relationships, from direct consultation to artist residencies. In doing so there is an emphasis on the importance of the relationships, as well as a suggestion of some of the complexity of the process.

The most powerful discussions of the importance of the exhibition's ethos of involving communities came from community members themselves. Oscar, the Bunuba woman, community leader and activist who was involved in the community consultation, gave an insightful description of the importance of community involvement. Oscar officially opened

Indigenous Australia, and also gave a powerful talk at Kings College (KC), London, in which she utilised the very sorts of words ('consent' and 'involvement') that can appear as tokenistic or clichéd. Oscar told the audience that:

> It is our triumph that in the heart of London, with the seat of government that once upon a time threatened to demolish us just down the road, our lives and heritages have come to be displayed through our equal consent and involvement (Oscar 2015).

In this short sentence Oscar demonstrated how potent even simple statements on collaboration could be. Rather than simply mentioning the 'equal consent and involvement', she embodied the power that the words describe by claiming the exhibition as an Indigenous Australian venture and success ('our triumph'). In doing so she upturned the power imbalance in the consultation process, and used the collaboration to legitimise the Indigenous Australian ownership of the exhibition, rather than the Museum's activities. Oscar's words not only demonstrate how these acknowledgements can empower collaborators in the right circumstances, but also provide an argument for continuing to include these phrases in press releases and talks, no matter how limiting or reductive they initially appear.

Oscar's statement also brought to light a meaning that was often left unspoken in acknowledgements. The many short statements on 'consultation' and longer articles and talks on the topic made it clear that relationships were important, but rarely addressed the larger question of why. In contrast Oscar explicitly identified that one outcome of these collaborative processes was that they acknowledged and attempted to address the power imbalance of colonialism. She achieved this by demonstrating that the agency ('equal consent and involvement') that Indigenous Australians had in the development of this exhibition at a British national museum, contrasts with a past in which British institutions attempted to deny Indigenous Australians their agency through violence and dispossession ('the seat of government that once upon a time threatened to demolish us') (Oscar 2015). In explicitly positioning the exhibition as a response to the devastating violence of the colonial past and its continued impacts Oscar also reinforces her point that rather than being the Museum's achievement the exhibition was a testament to the resistance and the resilience of Indigenous Australians.

Conclusion

Indigenous Australia opened to the public on Thursday 23 April 2015, with the official opening event taking place the following week, on Thursday 30 April. These two weeks were crammed with special events for guests and visitors, particularly those people who had been involved in producing the exhibition. The opening events culminated in a day long public symposium which brought together speakers from different museums, but was primarily designed to capitalise on the presence of a number of notable Australian professionals who had worked on *Indigenous Australia*. The symposium was titled *Challenging Colonial Legacies Today*: *museums and communities in Australia and East Africa* (held on Sunday 2 May). As well as using the unfamiliar comparison of Australia and East Africa,[27] the title was unusual for an exhibition symposium, because it did not focus on any explicit content or narratives within the exhibition. Instead by raising the concept of 'challenging colonial legacies', the title suggested that this was a key aim, or even mandate that underlay *Indigenous Australia* and was shared by other museums in (post)colonial contexts.

The title of the symposium presents 'challenging colonial legacies' as one answer to the central question of this chapter - what were the aims of the people who produced the *Indigenous Australia* exhibition?[28] The symposium was organised and attended by people from every participant group I identify at the beginning of this chapter (exhibitors, Indigenous stakeholders, UK audiences), so presumably the question was understood and accepted as relevant for the study of these collections.[29] While it seems that a central aim of the exhibition was to challenging colonial legacies, this is not however a particularly insightful answer on its own. Rather than elucidating the problem it only raises another question, - what does it mean to challenge colonial legacies, and how successful were the producers of *Indigenous Australia* in achieving this? In many respects this is the question that this chapter actually answers and in

[27] The combination of the two regions was suggested by Bolton as a way to share knowledge, practices and ideas beyond established networks. As Bolton noted, within the relatively small fields of specialist museum work, it can be beneficial to bring in fresh approaches and case studies, rather than having 'Australian's talking to other Australians' year after year. The conference also an opportunity to bring together research and ideas from two sections of AOA.

[28] It has to be remembered that I am asking this question about the things which were unique to *Indigenous Australia* as opposed to the more general aims and experiences of putting on any major exhibition in this context.

[29] Although no one voiced any disagreement with the concept in general, there were papers which questioned whether it was possible to fully challenge the colonial legacy. These included an insightful paper by John Giblin. His paper, *Museums challenging colonial legacies in East Africa today*, took a theoretical approach to whether the concept of challenging colonial legacies was possible in the light of museums' hegemonic roles (they emerged from the colonial era, he argued so could only ever work in relationship to it).

the paragraphs below I summarise the chapter in these terms. I did not start the chapter with this question however, because the idea that Western museums should address the colonial legacy is a recent ideological concept, rather than a long held function (as discussed in *Chapter 1*). It was therefore important to trace this concept within *Indigenous Australia*, identifying where it appears and interrogating what it meant to those involved, rather than take it as self-evident at the beginning.

As this chapter demonstrates, the concept of challenging colonial legacies was present in participants' aims throughout *Indigenous Australia*, but was not explicitly discussed in these terms. Instead, it was apparent in a number of common themes within participants aims, understandings and experiences of *Indigenous Australia.* In particular, it is apparent in three underlying aims which emerged in the early research stages and are prominent in other stages of the exhibition. The first aim was to research and present the difficult colonial histories of Australia and of the BM collection. The second aim was to facilitate meaningful and constructive engagement between the BM and Indigenous Australian communities. The third aim was to reflexively analyse the ongoing activities of the BM. Together these three aims not only demonstrate that those involved in the exhibition were aiming to challenge colonial legacies, they also suggest a broad definition of what this term meant to participants.

The prominence of this concept of challenging colonial legacies among different types of participants suggest that many of those involved shared broad ambitions for *Indigenous Australia*. In practice, the conversations and case studies discussed above reveal that within the three broad aims for the exhibition were a number of opinions and understandings that were nuanced, complex and not always in agreement. A good example of this was when some Indigenous Australian stakeholders did not want to express opinions on which objects should go on display, disrupting exhibitors' ideas of what the consent and involvement of these communities should mean in practice. Another example of the complexity of 'challenging colonial legacies' was the ambivalence of British focus group members towards the representation of difficult colonial histories in the exhibition. The complexity of these conversations reflect the strength and variety of opinions on the topic as well as the inclusion of a number of different professional organisations and resources. While the case studies in this chapter do not therefore provide a simple overview of the opinions involved, but instead provide an insight into a broader tapestry of contexts embedded in the production of *Indigenous Australia*.

The complexity of aims, understandings and experiences mean that it is not possible to trace how every aspect of the final display developed. It is possible, however, to draw the sections of this chapter together to present a broad picture of how the narrative, content and text of the exhibition developed. The basic outline of Indigenous Australia emerged from the *Research Projects*. It was developed by the exhibitors to showcase and celebrate the BM collection and therefore the peoples that it represented. Within this, there were three deeper goals of presenting the difficult shared history of Britain and Australia, involving Indigenous communities and reflecting on and enhancing the ongoing role of the BM in relation to Indigenous communities and their concerns. Perhaps because many of these aims were already shared by others, the basic outline and aims of *Indigenous Australia* did not change much during the other main influence on its development - *Community Engagement*. This process did, however, significantly influence the detail of the exhibition. Encounters between exhibitions and community members influenced the objects, films and images chosen for the display as well as the specific stories and texts within the broader narrative. The most significant encounters were those between Indigenous stakeholders and BM staff, particularly Sculthorpe (who led the consultations from the BM side), both of whom committed to a vast number of discussions despite the obvious practical difficulties of the process. The complexity and nuance of these conversations and the fact that they had such a tangible impact on the final display demonstrates a shared openness to the transformative opportunities of such encounters.

For the people who were most invested in the topic, *Indigenous Australia* was therefore the product of both a simple group of three underlying aims (or four including the aim of celebrating Australia and its Indigenous peoples), and a complex tapestry of individual understandings, activities and encounters. The term 'challenging colonial legacies' provides a vital context for understanding many of these diverse and nuanced ideas and events by placing them within a broader ideology. In doing so it allows a sort of conceptual breathing space in which to better understand more specific decisions and debates about the exhibition, suggesting that their meanings often stretched far beyond the display itself. The final activity discussed in this chapter, *Public Relations*, supports this hypothesis, demonstrating that participants in *Indigenous Australia* were strongly aware of the wider socio-political functions of colonial era collections and were working to use the BM's Indigenous Australian collection in particular ways. Museum staff, researchers and Indigenous stakeholders clearly wanted the exhibition to have an impact on broader relationships between Indigenous Australia and the UK. This did

not mean that they were disinterested in the display itself. Instead participants from all of the groups engaged deeply with the narrative, content and text, recognising that the final display was one of many ways in which the exhibition could challenge the colonial legacy. The outcomes of this venture are discussed in the next two chapters.

4. Text

After travelling to Europe as the touring Indigenous curator for *Aratjara* art (1993-4), a major exhibition of Indigenous Australian objects, Djon Mundine described a reaction European visitors had to the way the works were interpreted (Mundine 2013). The curators had presented the works with minimal labelling, including only artist, title, date and materials, in the same way as 'any other contemporary art' (Mundine 2013: 54). Many viewers were unhappy with this. They wanted long labels, diagrams and contextual photographs and claimed they couldn't understand the works without this. Mundine did not have a problem with these forms of interpretation per se, but he was disheartened that visitors were unwilling or unable to appreciate the works without contextual information. He saw it as evidence of prejudice against Indigenous Australian works. The same visitors, he explained, would be comfortable viewing European and American contemporary art with only minimal labels, even though these works could be just as absent of obvious meanings or narratives as Indigenous art forms. For example, he wrote, the audience in London insisted that he interpret the meanings of Western Desert paintings, but 'nobody seemed to be making the same demands of twenty of so pure white 'untitled' canvases by Robert Ryman in a nearby commercial gallery' (Mundine 2013: 54). Mundine's point was that visitors had the ability to appreciate artworks on a 'visual-emotional' level, but were unwilling or unable to apply this to Aboriginal artworks (Mundine 2013: 54). The implicit prejudice was that Aboriginal artists did not have the sophistication and creativity to imbue their works with the aesthetic qualities and conceptual messages that are regarded as the mainstay of contemporary European and American art. Mundine was particularly frustrated by the incident, because the exhibition audio guide, hand outs and catalogue all provided the forms of contextual information that visitors were asking for, it just wasn't available on the labels themselves (Mundine 2013: 54).

The root of this issue was not, of course, forms of label, but the persistence of certain Western systems of categorising objects. In this case, the two categories were those of art and ethnography, categories which Clifford argues have been at play since the early twentieth-century (Clifford 1988: 222-225). Curators recognised that if visitors approached Aboriginal artworks as contemporary art this could encourage them to appreciate the visual qualities of the works, because they were familiar with looking at contemporary Western artworks in this way. As minimal labelling is widely associated with contemporary art, the curators used it to denote

this categorisation. The message was not received by visitors. Instead they arrived having already decided that the works on display belonged to another category, that of ethnographic objects. They expected long contextual labels that explained meanings and iconography, because these are consistent with the ethnographic displays they were familiar with. When visitors did not find this, rather than adjusting their perception of which category the works fell into, they simply decided that the labels were wrong. This reading is supported by the otherwise baffling addendum to Mundine's account. The fact that visitors had access to all the contextual information they requested, but were still unhappy with the short labels suggests that they were less upset by not being able to understand the works, than by the disruption to their deeply held belief of which category the objects fell into.

Mundine's account of *Aratjara* illustrates how persistent and problematic the category of ethnographic objects can be when displaying Indigenous Australian material. The incident also provides two deeper insights for analysing displays of Indigenous Australian material in the UK. The first is that the style of interpretation has a significant impact on the messages embedded within the exhibition as a whole. Not only does the form of label and display come imbued with many complex meanings, it also has a significant impact on visitors' experiences of other aspects of the exhibition, to the extent that it can even diminish visitors' ability to engage with the objects at all. The second insight is that the messages intended by the curators may not be the messages that are received by the visitors. Just as the length of a label has connotations beyond those intended by the exhibitor, any aspect of an exhibition's content, narrative, text and display are embedded with layers of meaning that are both deliberate and unintended. This chapter interrogates what these meanings might have been.

One way of interrogating the messages *Indigenous Australia* conveyed is by considering visitors' understandings of the exhibition. This is the approach Mundine takes, and the one I use in *Chapter 5*. There is also value, however, to a hypothetical analysis of the exhibition's messages. This reading can draw out themes that may not be explicitly present in the available visitor surveys, but were still present in the exhibition space. A critical reading of the finished exhibition also allows for different and multiple meanings, themes and messages to be discussed together. In doing so it not only provides an opportunity to consider *Indigenous Australia* as a product or object in itself, but it also echoes the exhibition's position as a site which can embody multiple, complex, layered and even contradictory meanings and experiences (Macdonald 2002: 7-8). This chapter takes the form therefore of a description and analysis of *Indigenous*

Australia as a critical text, interrogating a range of potential themes, messages and meanings that were embedded within it.

The first part of this chapter considers the broad *Interpretative approach* used in *Indigenous Australia* and the meanings embedded in this. The second section interrogates other *Key themes*. While both of these sections refer to contemporary artworks, the third section of this chapter reflects separately on the role of contemporary artworks in the exhibition. A separate discussion of these works allows for a consideration of the unique role they had as objects which were often made to interact with and even interpret other parts of the display. The conclusion to this chapter considers how the meanings and themes present in the finished display of *Indigenous Australia* relate to the aims of the producers as discussed in *Chapter 3*.

Interpretive approach

Indigenous Australia displayed 176 objects in the relatively small space of Room 35 (around 400 square meters). It was divided into five sections, each of which had a different theme, based on the context it was illuminating (ill. 1). Section one was the *Introduction* to the Australian continent and the Indigenous peoples who live there. Section two, *Understanding Country*, provided an overview of Indigenous Australian knowledge, technologies, religions and ways of living off land and sea.[30] Section three, *Encounters in Country*, told stories from Indigenous Australian history, since Cook's first landing in 1770. Sections two and three were the largest sections, containing most of the objects and occupying the majority of the floor space. They were followed by two smaller sections. Section four, *Out of Country*, discussed the historic and ongoing roles of museums in collecting and displaying Indigenous Australian material. Section five, *Drawing on Country*, considered the role of contemporary Indigenous artists in museums.

The structure of *Indigenous Australia* therefore focused on illuminating different contextual meanings for the objects. This was supported by the text, which consisted of long contextual labels and panels, which promoted the contextual qualities of the objects, such as their use, history, and details of how they were made. In its structure and labelling *Indigenous Australia*

[30] The word 'country' was used, as it is by many Indigenous Australian's, to denote their intimate spiritual and physical connection to the land where they had traditional rights and spiritual connections. A text panel at the beginning of the exhibition explained this usage to visitors.

therefore took the opposite approach to *Aratjara*, promoting contextual, rather than visual qualities and meanings of objects. While this may have conveyed the impression that the aesthetic qualities of *Indigenous Australian* objects were not important, this is mitigated by the fact that other temporary exhibitions in the BM at the same time used the same approach to display the objects of Western cultures. This approach followed that of all recent BM temporary exhibitions, which as Francis has illustrated now focus on narratives of history and culture, rather than aesthetics (Francis 2015). The other major exhibition during this period even deliberately and overtly deconstructed the Western assumption that there is a dichotomous arrangement which divides objects into those of art and those of cultural relevance. *Defining Beauty: The Body in Ancient Greek Art* (26 March – 5 July 2015) provided cultural meanings and contexts for the formal qualities of ancient Greek sculpture and explored how this influenced later European thought and philosophy on art and beauty. In doing so it sent the message that Western 'art' objects were just as worthy of contextualisation as Indigenous Australian ones.

Illustration 1. (Next page). Narrative structure of *Indigenous Australia*. Text in black denotes the official titles of section, as visible in the exhibition space. Text in grey has been added by the author to explain the subject of each section and the underlying conceptual structure.

	Sections	Subsections
PART 1 thematic	**1. Introduction**	**N/A**
	2. Understanding Country culture/ ontology	**2.1 Dreamings of Country** religion
		2.2 Connected Countries trade
		2.3 Living off Country technology, knowledge, skills
		2.4 Patterns of Country aesthetic qualities of objects
		2.5 Torres Strait – Sea Country focus on Torres Strait Islands
		2.6 Communicating with Country ceremony
CENTRAL WALL		
PART 2 chronological/ historical	**3. Encounters in Country** history since 1770	**3.1 Early European Contacts and Outposts** Cook's first landing and the first fleet, penal colony at Port Jackson 1770 – beginning 19th century
		3.2 Exile and Encroachment violent expansion of colonies into Western Australia and Victoria, Tasmanian War
		3.3 Exploration and Indigenous Knowledge role of Indigenous Australian people in European exploration of Australia
		3.4 Expanding Frontiers frontier violence and Indigenous resistance
		3.5 Exclusion and Inclusion Indigenous Australian peoples' role in agricultural industry, removal of Indigenous Australian children from families (Stolen Generation)
		3.6 Recognition of Rights to Land Land Rights movement and successes
	4. Out of Country history of museum collecting	**N/A**
	5. Drawing on Country contemporary artists and museums	**N/A**

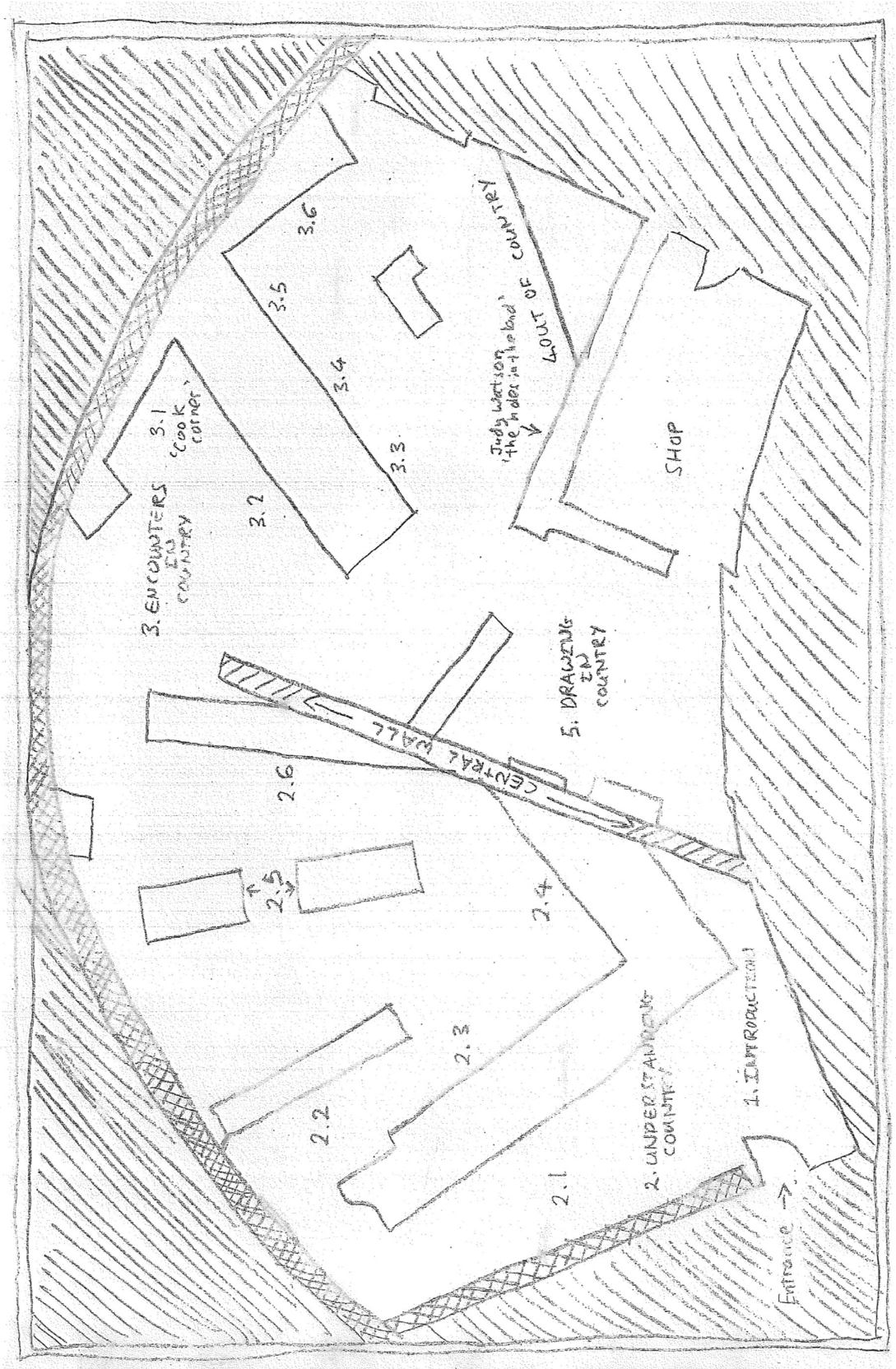


Illustration 2. Author's sketch plan, illustrating the layout of sections in *Indigenous Australia*

Indigenous Australia provided a creative approach to another interpretative problem, whether to contextualise objects with cultural information (about the objects production, meanings and use its original context), or historical information (about the people and events associated with an object). Each of these forms of interpretation places certain qualities of the objects over others. Cultural interpretation demonstrates objects' value in terms of the cultural knowledge that they hold and represent. It can demonstrate, for example, the sophisticated knowledge of resources and the particular skills needed to make the objects. Cultural interpretation could also help break down perceptions of Indigenous Australian peoples as different or other, demonstrating that objects that may appear unfamiliar at first are often responses to problems and concerns that all peoples face. Historical contextualisation denotes a very different set of values. The objects become documents of Indigenous Australian history, and a way to tell Indigenous perspectives of this history. They can tell the stories of particular individuals. Historical interpretation is also valued because it provides an opportunity to acknowledge the violence and disposition of the colonial era (and beyond). This was one of the three central aims of the producers of *Indigenous Australia* as outlined in *Chapter 3*. Not contextualising objects in this way has been critiqued for ignoring or attempting to deny Indigenous histories (see *Chapter 1* for a discussion of this).

The problem was approached by dividing the exhibition in half, with the first half providing what could be termed a cultural approach, which introduced Indigenous Australia peoples, ways of life and ontologies, and the second half providing a historic approach, introducing Indigenous Australian history since 1770. This dual approach was not explicitly described in the text, but it was signified spatially and intellectually. Spatially the division, which took place between the two main sections, Understanding Country and Encounters in Country, was made apparent with a wall, the only full height and full width architectural division in the whole exhibition space. This is visible in the sketch plan (ill. 2) and in figure 31 which is a view of *Out of Country* showing the central wall with doorway leading into Encounters in Country. Intellectually the distinction was made by organising the first half thematically, with no mention of historic events and organising the second half chronologically and historically. The first half also contained only objects by Indigenous Australian makers, while the second half included objects by European makers, which related to the stories told. The two-part structure was also hinted at in the exhibition subtitle. The layout reflected the dual meanings of the term *Enduring Civilisation*. The first half presented an introduction to an Indigenous Australian civilisation

that has endured for so long and the second half described how Indigenous Australian's endured Western concepts of 'civilisation' in the form of British colonisation.

The dual approach was also signalled by a dramatic shift in design. The colour scheme of the first half was light and bright, with walls and cases painted in a shade of white which had a subtle silver-green tint (see figs. 31, 32, 33, 34 for wide angle images of *Understanding Country*, which convey the look and feel of the first half of *Indigenous Australia*). The light walls and cases were accented with orange-red strips along the plinths and in the text of panels and with sheets of turquoise Perspex which were dotted about as the background to objects (fig. 35). As well as spot-lights on objects, light was shone on the back wall, which had a reflective, shimmery surface. There were no full height architectural divisions within this half and where possible the cases were glazed all the way around, creating vistas where the viewer could see through to other exhibits. There were open spaces creating vistas at certain points (see fig. 32). The overall effect of this first half was one of space, light and unity.

At the conceptual half way point the visitor passed through a narrow doorway into a space which had not been visible before. This was the beginning of *Encounters in Country* and, therefore, the historical half of the exhibition. The walls here were painted dark grey, with cases a lighter grey, accented by strips of crimson and purple backdrops (figs. 36, 37, 38, 39). Sheets of deep green Perspex were also placed behind selected objects (fig. 40). There were spotlights on objects, but the area was otherwise dimly lit. Objects were placed close together, with the majority arranged around the edge of a long rectangular plinth, which jutted out of the wall (visible in fig. 38, also see ill. 2). This design blocked views across the section, meaning that the visitor could not see the exhibits they were approaching or the ones they had left behind. The contrast between the two halves was enhanced by the lack of open space in the second half, which was dominated by narrow, sometimes crowded, corridors (fig. 41). The difference in design between the two sections, which was most apparent at the doorway between the two halves (see fig. 36) echoed the narrative contrast.

Providing different types of interpretation in different parts of the exhibition accorded the Indigenous Australian objects on the display the values associated with both categories. They could be important both because of the Indigenous knowledge they held and because of the historical events and figures they were associated with. This message was enhanced by the use of similar types of object in each section, to illustrate the two different types of stories. An

example of this is the first object in the exhibition. It was a large acrylic painting made in 2013, titled *Pukara* (figs. 42, 43; object ref. 1), a collaborative work by Simon Hogan, Ian Rictor, Roy Underwood and Lennard Walker (Spinifex people), all senior men from Tjuntjuntjara, in Spinifex Country in the Great Victoria Desert. The label read:

> Pukara is a men's Tjukurpa (Dreaming) in Spinifex country in the Great Victoria Desert. The painting depicts the story of Wati Kutjura (Two Men) – father and son in the form of water serpents. They are travelling on the son's journey of initiation. The son, going a little mad, decides to take off for a place called Mulaya to start a fight. His father chases after him. Their actions and encounters along the way create the geographic features and meanings of the land. Underwood describes this as 'a big story', meaning that it holds high ritual significance. Only senior men with detailed ceremonial knowledge understand the full meaning of the story.
> The artists, all senior men, collaborate here to paint storylines that cross a large area of country for which they hold shared authority.

The painting was accompanied by a map illustrating how the scene depicted related to a specific area of land. In this instance the painting is contextualised therefore with information about its deep significance as part of a particular Dreaming, as well as the knowledge of the land embedded within it. As the first object in the exhibitions also encourages the visitor to think about different ways of perceiving the world.

In the second half, the section *Encounters in Country* included a large acrylic painting that was something of a companion piece. *Kungkarangkalpa* (figs. 17, 39; object ref. 162) was painted in the same year as *Pukara* by a group of women artists from the same community, it was also the painting which featured on the exhibition poster.- Kunmanara Hogan, Tjaruwa Woods, Yarangka Thomas, Estelle Hogan, Ngalpingka Simms and Myrtle Pennington (Spinifex people). It was used, in this historical half of the exhibition, to tell a very different type of story. The label explained that:

> The Australian authorities removed Spinifex people from their land in the late 1950s and early 1960s, as the British and Australian governments
> needed large empty spaces to test atomic weapons.
> Between 1998 and 2000, both men and women
> painted major canvases to demonstrate their
> knowledge of traditional law and land in their bid to
> have their native title recognised. They are now able
> to live on their land again and continue to paint and
> pass on their important stories of Country.

Kungkarangkalpa therefore told a recent historical story of Spinifex peoples fight for Land Rights from 1998-2000. This complemented the story of spiritual and environment knowledge, and deep connections to Country in the first half of the exhibition. As well as demonstrating a range of values imbedded in the objects the dual approach also, therefore, allowed for the exploration of many layers of meaning within the same cultural forms.

Another effect of the dual narrative approach was that it conveyed the difference between Indigenous Australian and European knowledge systems. This was achieved largely through presentations of time and history. The first half used a non-chronological structure to introduce themes relating to Indigenous Australian knowledge, achievements and technologies. There were almost no mentions of historical events or figures. Objects from different time periods, ranging from the earliest objects in the collection to artworks produced in the last five years, were grouped together (for example in the basket display discussed in the *Key Themes* section below, fig. 44). This evoked the ways that Indigenous Australian ontologies are underpinned by different concepts of time and history from Western ontologies, particularly concepts of time as cyclical. In contrast, the second half used concepts of linear time and history, telling historical stories in chronological order. This evoked the knowledges systems that British colonisers brought to Australia. By presenting two different concepts of time the dual interpretative approach therefore gave value to Indigenous ontologies and knowledge systems (in the first half), while also presenting historical events in a format that visitors would recognise and be able to relate to their own general knowledge of events in Australia and the rest of the world (the second half).

The dual narrative approach was not without potential issues however. The approach was conceptually, quite complex and neither the overall approach nor the narrative devices used

were explicitly explained in the text. While arguments can be made for the unconscious effects of these underlying structures and devices, there is no guarantee that they will be interpreted in the way that was intended. There was a danger that rather than suggesting two conceptually different introductions to the same material, audiences would understand the narrative as representing Australia before and after colonisation. Not only would this misrepresent the material, which was of course all collected in the context of British imperialism, but it could also fuel myths about the history and consequences of colonisation. The abrupt and dramatic change between the two parts could suggest that colonisation was a fast and universal experience, rather than a diverse set of events. This unintended message potentially enhanced another possible meaning presented by the design of the two halves. The dark colours in the second half were intended, on one level, to reflect the 'sombre' histories portrayed (Sculthorpe 2017). Using the Western association of white/ light with good and dark/ dull with bad could however have other connotations. As the first half was light and bright and the second dark and dull visitors who read the exhibition as an account of Indigenous Australia before and after colonisation with former being 'good' and the latter 'bad'. This could diminish the effect of some of the narratives of the second half which emphasised ongoing Indigenous resistance and resilience in the face of colonisation.

Despite these potential misunderstandings, the dual approach provided a creative approach to the interpretative issues. By providing two different contexts *Indigenous Australia* demonstrated that the same objects could be valued for both their cultural and their historic qualities. In demonstrating how Indigenous Australian objects can have a range of meanings and narratives it also avoided essentialising the objects and the peoples who made and used them. The nuance and complexity of the interpretative approach echoed the nuance and complexity of the material. Furthermore, the complexity of the approach can be seen as a benefit. Karp has suggested that as any curatorial standpoint on non-Western material can project unwanted messages one answer is to 'exhibit the problem, not the solution' (Karp quoted in Karp and Kratz 2015: 281). By using two different styles of interpretation *Indigenous Australia* provided the viewer with an insight into the issues involved in displaying the material, albeit one which viewers may not have been consciously aware of. One of the most potent messages of the interpretation, therefore, was that the act of interpretation was one of subjective curatorial choice.

Key themes

As well as the messages embedded in the overall interpretative style, *Indigenous Australia*, contained other themes. These were embedded in the objects themselves, as well as in text panels, labels, contextual materials and design elements. These themes illustrate how aims that the producers had (discussed in *Chapter 3*) translated into the finished display. In particular, prominent themes in *Indigenous Australia* were related to the aims of exhibitors and Indigenous Australian community consultants to: convey the uniqueness and diversity of Indigenous Australian technologies and knowledge of land and sea; convey the difficult histories of colonisation; consider the role of museum in the past and today (particularly regarding the holding of objects); and provide Indigenous perspectives of Australian histories.

Uniqueness and diversity of technologies and knowledge

One of the themes apparent in the first half (which comprised mainly *Understanding Country*) was the sophistication of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander technologies. This theme was particularly strong in the subsection *Living off Country*. The exhibit began by describing the use of fire to clear land for hunting, which was demonstrated by a recent photograph of the practice (fig. 29). Another exhibit in this section showcased a number of hunting tools, including different types of boomerang and spear throwers (fig.45). Labels described how the tools were made and used in the particular environment they originated from. For example, a label for a hooked boomerang from Tennant Creek explained that it was made from 'the base of Acacia trees, where the trunk meets the root, to give them strength', and also explained how this type of boomerang was used by Warmungu men to hunt flocks of parrots (the hooked boomerang is the large red boomerang in the centre of the case in fig. 45; object ref. 47). This demonstrated the knowledge of the country Warmungu men needed to make the tools, and how their design met particular needs.

The display of different types of boomerang also provided a visual indication of the diversity that could exist in one form across the Australian continent (fig. 45). Other displays demonstrated this by placing baskets and shields from different regions next to each other (fig 44) and by showing the diverse forms of painting (fig. 46). This complemented other aspects of the display, particularly the text and contextual materials, which portrayed the theme of diversity in terms of the diverse Australian landscape and the number of different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups. A large map near the entrance depicted the (rough) territories

of different language groups (figs 27, 28). Thumbnail maps, printed on every exhibition label, also reinforced the concept that each object came from a particular area and group of people. Similarly label texts emphasised diversity and distinction by use of specific group and place names within label texts, as well as terms from Aboriginal and Torres Strait languages. For example, a label for a didjeridoo, not only explained that it was originally made and used solely in a relatively small area of northern Australia, but also that 'Groote Eylandt people call it a ngarrriralkpwina and Yolngu people a yidaki' (object ref. 96). By illustrating how, within this small area it had different names for different groups, the label reinforced the theme of diversity.

The comparison of different forms of objects also had a potential flaw however. The relatively small space of Room 35 (400 square meters), combined with the high number of objects (176) left little space for each exhibit, meaning that these comparative displays often took place in one, crowded case. In some instances this obscured the formal qualities of the objects. One example of this is in the display of baskets (fig. 45). This display included two bicornual baskets or jawun, a particular form of rigid, open necked basket that is unique to the rainforest region of north Queensland (figs. 47, 48; object refs. 35, 36). . Their final form is a feat of engineering, which Morphy describes as appearing as 'the architectural projection of a mathematical formula combining strength with flexibility' (Morphy 1998: 347). While the aesthetic qualities are subjective, it can be convincingly argued that the display, which placed the baskets high up, against a backboard, and nestled amongst other objects did not allow the viewer to make this judgement. Furthermore, the position prevented a good view of form and construction of the jawun. This is supported by comparing the images of the finished display (fig. 45) with the photographs of the two jawun taken before the exhibition (figs. 47, 48). In the latter the angle and backdrop enhance the formal qualities and allow observation of the inside of the basket. This potentially, therefore, disrupted the key theme that there were complex skills and knowledge embedded in the group of baskets.

The inclusion of contemporary objects which used modern materials, such as plastics in the acrylic paintings demonstrated how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue traditional practices within the globalised modern world. For example, *Ghost Net Basket* (2010) by Mahnah Angela Torenbeek (Wulgalgal people) from Moa in the Torres Strait, was made with nylon thread from fishing nets washed up on island shorelines after being cut loose from fishing vessels (fig. 49; object ref. 40) . Furthermore, the label referenced Torres Strait activism on global issues, explaining that 'by removing the nets, using them to make baskets, and

educating people about the environmental hazard they cause Torrenbek is upholding her traditional role to care for the sea'. By demonstrating how the materials (nylon nets) and practices (industrial scale fishing) of modernity are tied to Torrenbek's 'traditional' connection to the sea, the label disrupts notions that there is a dichotomy between 'modern' and 'traditional'. It also made the point that 'traditional' practices are in inseparable from global political and environmental concerns.

Difficult histories

At the half way point the messages in *Indigenous Australia* changed to centre on themes which illustrated the consequences of British colonial interest in Australia. Particular objects and stories illustrated wider trends which typified different time periods and different areas. One of these themes was extreme violence against Aboriginal people in the South East of Australia during the first part of the 19th century. A section titled *Exile and Encroachment*, told the story of the Black War in Tasmania, in which the Tasmanian Aboriginal population was 'reduced to near extinction' with some women were abducted by sealers and people who survived other waves of violence exiled to Flinders Island. Objects in this section included a club and shell necklace made by people in exile on Flinders Island. There were also objects made by colonisers including a Tasmanian *Proclamation Board*, on loan from the MAA (fig. 50; object ref. 122). The board was designed as a pictorial representation of British law and given to Aboriginal Tasmanians (Edmonds 2011: 201-202). The *Proclamation Board* was designed by British colonial representatives to illustrate how Aboriginal people and British settlers would be treated as equals under British law (something which did not come to pass) (Edmonds 2011: 201-202). In the exhibition space the scenes of crime and punishment which were depicted on the board seemed to serve, instead, as representations of the violence described in the text. Hanged men and British settlers holding guns were particularly memorable. While the theme of violence and dispossession was particularly strong in *Exile and Encroachment* it was present in many of the sections in many other subsections of *Encounters in Country*.

Alongside stories and objects which described colonial era violence, there were explorations of collaborative relationships. A club belonging to Bungaree (1775-1830), a man from Broken Bay in Sydney, was used to describe his role on voyages to chart the coast of Australia with British navigators Matthew Flinders (1774-1814) and later Parker King, who collected objects which are now in the BM collection (see *Chapter 1)* (object ref. 132). Other stories in this section used quotes from British explorers and settlers to convey the important role of

Aboriginal guides and interpreters in the British navigation and settlement of Australia. The stories were not all positive however. In an exhibit on Wiradjuri man John Piper (life dates unknown) who acted as a guide for the explorer Mitchell in 1836, Mitchell's ambivalence about his relationships with Aboriginal peoples is conveyed through quotes from his published journals. One quote conveys respect for Piper's skills and knowledge: 'In tracing lost cattle, speaking to the wild natives, hunting or diving, Piper was the most accomplished man in the camp' (original quote from Mitchell 1838a: 162). In another Mitchell laments building relationships with Aboriginal people. He writes: 'How injudicious we [were] in giving these savages presents; had we not done so we should not have been so much importuned by them' (original quote from Mitchell 1838b: 288). Mitchell's ambivalence towards the Aboriginal people he encounters illustrates the difficulties of reconciling the very different Aboriginal and European understandings of social relationships and responsibilities. This story complicated the message from the section, demonstrating that collaborations could be fraught with misunderstandings.

Another prominent theme in *Encounters in Country* was resistance. One subsection, *Expanding Frontiers*, displayed a boomerang believed to have belonged to Jandamarra (c. 1873-1897), a Bunuba man from the Kimberly region who led campaigns against settlers in the 1890s (fig. 51, 40; object ref. 139). There were also objects from the region collected by Sub-Inspector Craven Harry Ord (1856-1923), the settler policeman who headed the hunt which ended with Jandamarra being killed. Other forms of resistance were also explained. A visual timeline, composed of photographs and objects, illustrated 20th century Aboriginal rights movements, such as the successful campaign for Indigenous Australians to get full voting rights (achieved in 1962) (the timeline is the projection visible in the background in fig. 52). *Exclusion and Inclusion* used a drawing (c. 1945–53) by an unknown child artist (Noongar people) Carrolup, a residential school in Western Australia, to tell the story of the Stolen Generations (fig. 53; object ref. 153). These were children removed from their parents from 1910-1970 and placed in institutions under the assimilation policies of various governments. A placard calling for Land Rights, told the story of the *Aboriginal Tent Embassy*, a site of protest erected outside the Australian parliament in Canberra in 1972, illustrated the urban side of rights movements (fig. 54; object ref. 164).

The role of museums

Section 4, *Out of Country* considered how Indigenous Australian Objects came to British museums (figs 57, 58 show views of this section, which consisted of one large case, embedded in a wall). One of its messages was that objects came to museums via different routes. The introductory panel contrasted objects which were traded within the framework of reciprocal relationships with the BM's acquisition of human remains, taken 'without consent'. The former category of more nuanced and reciprocal trade was represented with objects traded by Torres Strait leader Maino with the anthropologist Haddon in 1888-9 (Moore 1984: 143). These included a crocodile dance mask (fig. 55; object ref. 172) (McKinney 2012; Rivers et al. 1901: 302 and pl. XXXIV). The text explained that Maino wanted the objects to be on display a big museum so that they could tell the story of his grandfather Kebisu (Sculthorpe et al. 2015: 238).

The complex story of the BMs acquisition of human remains was represented with a description of the return of two cremation bundles, to Aboriginal Tasmanians in 2006 (see *Introduction* for more discussion on this event). In the absence of the remains themselves, the object used to illustrate this event was a t-shirt given to the Museum by the Tasmanian delegation that collected the remains. The t-shirt was printed with the words 'Lutrawita has a black history', using the double meaning of black to convey that Tasmania (Lutrawita) has an Aboriginal history, as well as a dark history (visible in figs. 57, 58; object ref. 165).

The section also considered the ongoing debate over the BM's holding of other Indigenous Australian objects. The text provided three contemporary Indigenous people's opinions on the question of repatriation. These took the form of three large quotes, printed on the wall next to the *Out of Country* exhibit (fig. 56, 57). The quotes read:

> 'It is a responsibility of museums to tell the truth
> about the people and the history and the culture
> if they are to keep the objects at the museum.'
> Neil Carter, Gooniyandi/Kidji people, 2013

> 'There will be no spiritual peace until the
> dead are returned to country.'
> Delegation of Torres Strait Islanders to the British Museum,
> unsuccessfully seeking the return of ancestral remains, 2012

> ‘It [Indigenous object] doesn’t belong to
> the people of England, it doesn’t belong
> to a museum of England, it certainly doesn’t
> belong to the Australian government.
> It belongs to the traditional tribal people
> of this country’.
> Seith Fourmile, Yidinji, 2012

The quotes are notable for referencing an unsuccessful repatriation claim. By including discussion on the topic of repatriation claims the exhibit touched on one of the key aims of exhibitors and community consultants; to be reflexive about the BM’s ongoing role with regard to its Indigenous Australian collection. In also provided the opportunity for a range of voices to be heard.

Multiple narratives

The wall quotes in *Out of Country* also exemplify another theme, which was present throughout the whole display - that there are multiple opinions and narratives for every topic and event. These diverse narratives were available not only through quotes on walls, panels and labels, but also through contextual images and films and the objects themselves, which often provided multiple perspectives of the same histories and activities. A good example of this was the area of *Encounters in Country* which discussed the encounter between Gwegal men and Cook and his men at Botany Bay in April 1770 (fig. 59, also see fig. 37). ‘Cook corner’, as this part of the exhibition was named by those working on the exhibition, contained a range of voices commenting on the event. As well as the curatorial voice in the label, and the shield itself, there were quotes from Cook, a British officer who was present at the event, and Williams, a contemporary Indigenous man from the region (see *Chapter 3* for a discussion of these narratives). Other perspectives were then provided by a chart of Botany Bay which had belonged to (and may have been drawn by) Cook (object ref. 111) and watercolour drawing, made at the time of the encounter, of Aboriginal people fishing at Botany Bay, by Tupaia, a Ra’iatean navigator who had joined Cook’s voyage in Tahiti (fig. 60; object ref. 110) (for attribution of drawings to Tupaia see Nugent 2009: 88-89; Salmond 2003: 74-76; Smith 2005). On top of these perspectives were two contemporary artworks by Indigenous artists which commented on the event, a photograph by Michael Cook (a Bidjara artist, based in Brisbane)

and a painting by Vincent Namatjira (a Western Arrernte/Pitjantjatjara artist, represented by Iwantja Arts in Alice Springs) (figs. 61, 62). A 2014 quote from Namatjira added a further layer to the perspectives on display. 'It was the beginning of our shared history. Everything after Cook was between all of us' (the original quote used in *Indigenous Australia* was supplied to the British Museum by Namatjira, via Iwantja Arts).

These multiple perspectives work to convey the subjectivity of the standard historical record of the encounter (as written by British historians from Cook's and Banks' journals). For example Tupaia's drawing conveys a very different account of the Botany Bay encounter from Cook's description. Cook's account describes two Indigenous men he encountered gesticulating with spears, and describes how one of the men was struck with shots from a British gun (see *Introduction* and *Chapter 3*). In contrast Tupia's drawing from the same week spent in Botany Bay depicts two men, spearing a fish, visible in the clear, still water of the harbour. The drawing conveys the close relationship Gwegal people had to the sea and presents a view of their lives that contrasts the violence described by Cook. Michael Cook's photograph *Undiscovered #4* subverted both of these rather serious perspectives, with a tongue-in-cheek account of the 'discovery' of Australia (fig. 61). As the British ship arrives on the horizon it is awaited by an Aboriginal man dressed in the uniform of British soldier. Namatjira's take on (James) Cooks' encounters in Australia is similarly irreverent, depicting Cook signing a declaration that turns out to be part of his shirt (fig. 62). These works not only challenged the audience to think more deeply about the other versions of history on display, they also confronted the founding myths of the Euro-Australian nation. In her reflection on this part of the exhibition Nugent wrote that these multiple narratives served 'to enrich and multiply the possibilities for the interpretation of this history' (Nugent 2015). Its value lay in not providing the audience with a clear meaning, but encouraged them to see the nuances and contradictions of Australian history.

Contemporary artwork

Contemporary artworks occupied a unique place among the objects in *Indigenous Australia*. As with all of the objects in the exhibition they were chosen because the stories they embodied fit within the broader narrative. In many cases they were also however a form of interpretation themselves. In the first half of the exhibition, for example, the section *Connected Countries*

contained a painting of Macassan fishermen, *Makasar Boiling Down Trepang* (1964), by Yolngu artist Mathaman Marika (Rirratjiŋu clan, Dhuwa moiety) (fig. 63; object ref. 12). This painting illustrated the historic relationship between Yolngu and Macassan fisherman, who came from South Sulawesi, Indonesia every wet season to gather trepang (beche-de-mer) and prepare it for markets in South-East Asia (Bilous 2011: 372; Caruana et al. 2013: 160; Mulvaney 1989: 22-24). This trade took place for around 200 years from the mid eighteenth-century until 1907 (Bilous 2011: 372; Mulvaney 1989: 22). The scenes include Macassans on their ships and the process of preparing the trepang, using beaters (the scene at the top) (Caruana et al. 2013: 160). In doing so the painting provided the viewer with a deeper understanding of another object, a Yolngu ceremonial basket, which symbolised this relationship between Yolngu and Macassan's through painted designs, embedded in layers of metaphor (fig. 64; object ref. 16). The red squares with white crosses reference women's breast girdles, which in turn symbolise the blooming clouds of the wet season (Sculthorpe et al. 2015: 28). The other square, with the black background and a design, resembling a squashed white oblong, depict the sales of Macassan ships (Sculthorpe et al. 2015: 28). Marika's painting provided, therefore, an interpretation of the basket, a depiction of the trepan trade for an unfamiliar audience (that would have otherwise involved a lot of textual interpretation), and evidence of the ongoing memory of this history for Yolngu today.

In the second half of the exhibition artworks were not only used to aid the main narrative, but also to disrupt it by provide different perspectives from the curatorial voice in the label, or from the European historical sources. This ability to comment on the narrative was the reason why contemporary works transcend the otherwise strict rule that objects in the second part of the exhibition were presented in historical context. The exhibit on Cook's first landing exemplifies this. The two contemporary works, by Namatjira and Cook, did not originate from the Botany Bay region in 1770. They were included instead because they provided two perspectives on the event in addition to that provided in the label. As these special interpretative qualities were accorded to contemporary artworks in the second half, it is worth considering them in more depth, asking what impact they had on the stories, themes and messages *Indigenous Australia* presented.

Before considering how contemporary works influenced the display it is worth considering why these works were accorded these special interpretative qualities in the first place. A number of studies have established, indigenous artists working in museums have ability to influence

exhibitions not only through their artworks, but also through their involvement in curatorial processes, education and programming (Barrett and Millner: 69-98; Hooper et al. 2012; Morphy 2007; Raymond and Salmond 2008). Even when they are not formally curating an exhibition, artists who work directly with museum staff influence decisions relating to content, narrative and events. Barrett and Milner describe how, when artists enter museums, they 'work not only with collections, but also with new ways of thinking' (Barrett and Millner: 6). One of the ways artists have influenced museums is by bringing different intellectual approaches to colonial histories. The freedom that artists have from established academic and institutional models for exhibiting colonial era material has led to them developing new ways to present indigenous histories and perspectives (Barrett and Millner 2014: 69-98; Thomas 1995; von Zinnenburg Carroll 2014). As Indigenous Australian artist Fiona Foley explains, while museum professionals are often limited to finding different ways to interpret 'the history [that] has been written by the victors', artists have more creative freedom to give voice to 'the silent histories of the Indigenous populations' (Foley in Barrett and Millner 2014: 50). Similarly Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll argues that Indigenous Australian artists who work with historical themes and materials are 'intervening distinctively in the colonial record to produce Aboriginal art history' that counters the 'historical blind spots' in Euro-Australian history (von Zinnenburg Carroll 2014: 3). This ability to provide an insight into missing perspectives provides the justification for the positioning of contemporary works in the historical sections of *Indigenous Australia.* Rather than suggesting that the perspectives of contemporary artists equated to those of people over 200 years ago, the anachronism provided an alternative history. As well as bringing new perspectives to the history collection, artists can influence exhibitions in more visceral ways, engaging with the spiritual and emotional aspects of collections and the people who work with and visit them (Hooper et al. 2012; Veys 2008). Contemporary Polynesian artists have been described as 'transforming' the *Pacific Encounters* exhibition at the SCVA, culturally and cosmologically, by imposing particular cultural protocols on a space and imbuing the space with the power and presence of ancestors (Hooper et al. 2012).

All of the living artists whose work featured in *Indigenous Australia* had the potential to have these sorts of transformative impacts on the final display. For example, the Spinifex artists influenced the narrative in *Recognition of Rights to Land*. This section could have included any of a large number of case studies to illustrate Indigenous Australians' fight for Land Rights. Ultimately, the exhibit focused on the story of Spinifex peoples land rights battle in the Great Victoria Desert, using the women's painting, *Kungkarangkalpa* ((fig. 17; object ref. 162) , to

describe how Spinifex people used paintings of the land as documents of their ongoing ownership and connections. The decision to concentrate on this case study would have been unlikely if Museum staff did not have an ongoing relationship with Spinifex artists, through the recent acquisition of paintings and visits to the community.

Those artists who produced work specifically for the BM had an even greater opportunity to influence the finished display. The most prominent artists in this respect are Abe Muriata, who produced a work as a special commission for the BM, and Julie Gough and Judy Watson, two of the artists who undertook residencies at the BM as part of the *Engaging Objects* project.[31] These three artists not only produced work specifically for *Indigenous Australia*, they also produced work which was related to *Indigenous Australian* museum collections. Their relationship with the BM and the fact that their work was tailored to *Indigenous Australia* meant that they had the ability to directly and deliberately influence the finished display. This section focuses therefore, on the work of these artists asking what their aims were and how their work impacted on the final exhibition.[32] I discuss the artists in the order in which their works appear in the exhibition.

Julie Gough

Gough grew up in Victoria and Western Australia. She is now based in Tasmania, working as an artist, writer and curator (Gough 2001: 8). She is a Trawlwoolway woman, descended on her mother's side from the Trawlwoolway people of north-eastern Tasmania. Gough studied Prehistory and English Literature at the University of Western Australia, graduating in 1986 (Gough 2001: 8). Around 1990 she started attending night classes in drawing, a decision she described as 'a drastic departure and yet something I felt each day more certain I needed to undertake' (Gough 2001: 8). In 1991 she enrolled full time at Art School at Curtin University, Western Australia. Gough describes her decision to become a full time artist as the result of a road trip in a remote part of Western Australia.

[31] Of the other artists who took part in the residency programme, two, Jonathan Jones and Elma Kris, did not have works in the BM exhibition. The other two, Wukun Wanambi and Ishmael Marika, featured in another exhibition in Room 3 at the BM, titled *Larrakitj: Aboriginal memorial poles*, which ran from 12 March – 25 May 2015.

[32] These artists were also the artists who I engaged with the most closely and the material and knowledge which they shared has also influenced my decision to focus on these artists. I met most of the artists after I began work on the exhibition, but I had already interviewed two of the artists, Jonathan Jones and Judy Watson, before I began working at the BM.

> The previous year [to enrolling at Curtin University], I had travelled to the north west of Western Australia on the back of a motorbike. As we passed a huge eagle devouring something on the side of the highway the bird flew at that precise moment directly into our heads… I truly saw everything flash before me and in that moment – and I realised that I had not been honest with myself, or with my life, and that I had things to do. (Gough 2001: 8)

Gough's description of this incident and how it led her to the practice of art full time illustrates three key features of her work. The first is a determination to tell the truth. In Gough's work, which focuses on Indigenous Australian history, this usually applies to the wider truths of Australia's colonial past, but it emerges, as the eagle strike illustrates, from the realisation that she 'had not been honest' with herself (Gough 2001: 8). This, Gough writes, stems from her own family's history which was one of 'denials, unaccountable absences, loss, and lost ties, time and place', particularly around their Aboriginal identity (Gough 2001: 8). Gough writes, for example that 'my mother promised my father not to tell 'us kids' about being Aboriginal' (Gough 2001: 8). The second feature that Gough's epiphany illustrates is that she has a mandate, as she puts it she 'had things to do' (Gough 2001: 8). This mandate is centred on challenging and changing people's understanding of Australia's colonial past, an unchanging current in her work. Goughs aims to do this not by educating viewers with information. Instead, and this is the third feature of her work, she aims to act on the viewer physically, just as the collision with an eagle jolted her from her own denials and unawareness. As Gough explains, she intends her work to be 'the catalyst for awakening memory in our present rather than merely providing alternative narratives or metaphorical traces of the past' (Gough 2001: 3; see also Gough 2014).

Gough undertook her residency at the British Museum in November 2013, working, in particular, with objects from Tasmania. In the end Gough contributed a work which reflected on an object at the MAA, an institution she had worked with in the past. The object, the Tasmanian *Proclamation Board* (fig. 50), was loaned to the BM for *Indigenous Australia* and Gough designed her work to complement it. The piece was a version of an earlier work *The Promise*. The new work had a new title, *Inheritance*, but it took the same form as *The Promise*, using cut outs of the figures painted on the *Proclamation Board* and hanging from the disassembled back of a chair and shining a light against the whole form to create a work that was a shadow (object ref. 129). It was displayed so that the shadow of the figures and of the chair were outlined on the wall opposite the *Proclamation Board* (see fig. 65 which shows the *Proclamation Board* on the left and *Inheritance*, as a shadow, on the right). The piece illustrated

Gough's approach to presenting history through 'awakening memory' in opposition to more traditional museum approaches of providing narratives and information (Gough 2001: 3). On the *Proclamation Board* itself the contemporary European viewer could still 'read' the pictograms (with the prompt of the brief museum label) as a narrative explaining the consequences of murder under British law, as originally intended. The BM label then prompted the visitor to reflect on this intellectually by suggesting the cultural blindness of the British people who constructed the scheme, and explaining the failure to treat Aboriginal Tasmanian peoples in the same way as European settlers. In contrast, the figures in *Inheritance*, were suspended and out of context, becoming more simple evocations of violence and horror.

Judy Watson

Watson is a Brisbane based artist. She was born in Mundubbera in Queensland. Her matrilineal family are from Waanyi county, located to the south of the Gulf of Carpentaria in north-west Queensland (Perkins 2004: 168-169). Watson studied Fine Arts at the University of Tasmania, Hobart, before undertaking a Graduate Diploma at Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, Victoria, which was highly regarded for its teaching of printmaking techniques (graduating 1986). Watson is most widely recognised for her etchings and lithographs, but also produces painting and sculpture. Her work explores relationships to country and draws on Indigenous Australian history and museum collections.

Watson first visited the British Museum in 1996, viewing collections from the Queensland region which were, at the time, located in an external store in east London. During this visit to the UK she also saw collections at the Horniman Museum (HM), London. Watson produced a series of etchings after her first visits to the BM and HM. The series, from 1997, was titled *our bones in your collections our hair in your collections our skin in your collections*. Each print was given the individual section of the title which related to the objects depicted (for example a print depicting a skirt made from human hair was titled *our hair in your collections* fig. 66) . Each print referenced objects in British museum collections. There appear to be connections between objects in the BM collection and the etchings, such as between a women's arm band from Macarthur River (BM: Oc1903,0404.36) and the forms in *our hair in your collections* (figs 67 and 66). It is not possible to match objects exactly, however, as Watson deliberately allowed small details to change as she 'recreated' them (Watson, interview published in Perkins 2010: 68). The objects are also partially obscured by swirls or smudges of ink and by other

forms, such as the oval dots, reminiscent of scattered seeds, which appear on *our skin in your collections*. Watson further hid the forms of the objects by overlaying the etchings with chine collé, describing this translucent paper covering as a form of protection, preventing the objects from 'being feasted upon too easily' (also see Perkins 1997: 17; Watson, interview published in Perkins 2010: 68). Watson didn't explicitly discuss the colonial legacy of the objects or their holding in British collections, but when the series was displayed in 1997 at *In Place (Out of Time)* at Museum of Modern Art (MMA), Oxford, the catalogue included an essay by Hetti Perkins, titled 'our skeletons in your closet' (Perkins 1997: 16).[33]

1996, the year of Watson's first visit to the BM, was also the year in which the Museum acquired its first work by her, produced before the visit. The etching, *salt water country*, depicts the salt-pans in far north-west Queensland and was one of several paintings and prints that Watson produced after visiting her great-grandmother's country in the early 1990s (Perkins 2004: 168-169). The print was one of a number of contemporary Australian prints donated to the BM by the Australian Print Workshop in Melbourne, a workshop and publisher which was at the centre of a thriving Australian printmaking scene. This and subsequent donations from the Australian Print Workshop went to the BM Department of Prints and Drawings, which already held a significant portfolio of modern and contemporary Australian prints (Coppel and Caruana 2011). Watson's first work in the Museum lay, therefore, in a different department from the collections from her Country, which she had come to visit. These were all located in the stores for AOA. Watson's print and the Queensland objects in the BM collections were rooted in the same landscapes, but separated in the Museum both spatially and by institutional categories. While it was not intentional the separation was fitting in the light of the work that Watson produced after her first visit to the BM, which explored themes of dislocation in museum collections. The institutional space between Watson's print depicting her Country and the BM collection from this area, mirrored the physical separation between the historic objects and the land and people from which they came from.

Watson would, perhaps, approve of the way that the acquisition of her work illuminated some of the contemporary tensions imbedded in the BM's inherited structures and systems of categorisation. She is conscious of the ability of artists to bring new ways of thinking and doing to the museum and considers an element of friction to be vital to this process. Watson described this perspective during a panel talk at the BM on contemporary art:

[33] Watson's titles are always lower-case.

> There should always be controversy in the air surrounding artists and makers, museums and objects and culture. It comes as a spark of energy, reverberating from the objects, which ricochets to the ceilings and the walls and the floors and between the other objects and the viewers in the space… It is this that keeps museums alive and relevant, part of an ongoing dialogue and questioning as the past and the present collide and coalesce like a walk in wardrobe of old, deep memories and sparkling new acquisitions. (Judy Watson. Paper given at "The art of country: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art today", Panel discussion at the British Museum, 1 May 2015. Quoted from script provided by the artist before the event. Author's papers).

While Watson encourages and celebrates 'controversy' between the artist and the museum, her description of this relationship also demonstrates a commitment to working with museums. This is particularly evident when she discusses how artists' intervention 'keeps museums alive and relevant'.

Watson's continued engagement with the museum collections was one of the reasons why she was appointed as an Artistic Fellow on the Engaging Objects project in 2013. One of the purposes of the residency was to enable the artists to propose work to be displayed in the anticipated *Indigenous Australia* exhibition. Watson requested to see objects from the region around her country. These included woven bags filled with pituri (a mild narcotic also known as native tobacco as its active ingredient is nicotine) from the Gregory River region (figs. 68-69; object ref. 23 and 24), a string skirt or apron from Macarthur River in the Northern Territory, (BM: Oc1903,0404.32) and a wooden paddle, which was probably collected on Sweers Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria (BM: Oc1973,Q.18). Watson drew these objects and also took back photographs of the objects and of the study room and, where possible, other areas of the store (figs. 70, 71 show Watson during this visit).

After returning to Australia Watson envisioned a number of works that could be displayed in the BM exhibition, or its counterpart at the NMA. These included a sculpture, a film and another series of etchings (Watson, Judy. Interview by author. Brisbane, 28 February 2014). It was the series of etchings which were ultimately displayed in *Indigenous Australia*. Watson produced the work in early 2015. Watson titled the series *the holes in the land*, and distinguished each individual work by a number (see fig. 72, *the holes in the land* 3 and 73, *the holes in the land 4*). Like her earlier series on the BM collection, these etchings reproduced the objects she has seen during her visit to the Oceanic store including the pituri bags. In four of the prints these

objects were overlaid with historic plans of the BM and its display cases. The objects in these prints are finely etched, but, unlike her earlier series, *our bones in your collections…,* they do not disappear under layers of line, colour and paper, instead the detail is difficult to make out because the objects are very dark. Up close it is possible to make out the fine details such as the weaving and knotting of the skirts, and the stitching on the pituri bags, but from a distance the objects appear to be in silhouette as if they are underexposed (fig. 75). The final two works in the series appear not to depict any objects at all, only plans covered by areas of colour.

Out of the six etchings that made up the whole series, two, *the holes in the land 3* and *the holes in the land 4*, went on display in *Indigenous Australia.* It was not possible to hang all six, due to the limited floor space in Room 35. One of the two etchings that were chosen depicted objects modelled on those in the final exhibition. *the holes in the land 3* which related to the pituri bags which were on display to illustrate trade items in the earlier section *Connected Countries*. The etchings were situated near the end of the exhibition against the dark grey paint on the wall (fig. 75). Officially they were part of section four *Out of Country* and provided a contemporary artists' comment on the stories and debates around museum collecting that were discussed in that section. On the ground the prints appeared rather separate from the rest of this section. While the other *Out of Country* stories were all enclosed in one large, deep case, the prints were hung on a wall off to the side (fig. 57 and ill. 2). Rather than being part of *Out of Country* they seemed to drift in a space between *Out of Country* and *Drawing on Country,* the section on artists and museums, which consisted of one object, the jawun by Muriata which is discussed below. The placement was, to some extent, due to the layout of Room 35 as it would not have been possible to fit the prints on the narrow end wall which was allocated to *Out of Country*. While not necessarily intentional the placement suited the work, echoing Watson's own vision of the artist as a somewhat awkward presence in the museum and giving the work its own space to contribute to the wider exploration of the colonial legacy.

The location of the prints also made for an interesting relationship between the objects in the prints, and their physical counterparts which were on display in other areas of the exhibition. The physical objects were not directly visible from where the prints were placed, being separated by walls and cases. It was, however, possible for the visitor to draw their own visual connections between the objects and the prints. This was particularly true of the colourful boat like forms of the pituri bags, which are distinctive enough to linger in the memory. There was also potential for the prints to interact with the historic objects in deeper ways. Artists and

museum professionals who worked on the exhibition *Pasifika Styles* (MAA) have described the ways in which contemporary art can interact with historic collections. In the case of *Pasifika* styles the artists reinvigorated the dormant power of ancestors (Herle 2008: 70; Veys 2008; Wilson 2008a, b). Veys, who worked on this project termed the process 'awakening sleeping objects' (Veys 2008: 111). Watson was also interested in the lives of the objects, considering their time in the store as a dormant period. Rather than Veys' vision of sleeping objects, however, she described the objects from her Country as 'starving':

> I imagine [the objects] almost like living beings, viewing and panting in the dark and sort of starving and waiting to be fed. I was laughing with Jill [Hasell, the AOA Museum Assistant Watson worked with] saying 'what do you feed them', you know, they're hungry.' (Judy Watson. Interview by author. Brisbane, 28 February 2014).

Watson was concerned, therefore, not with awakening or reinvigorating objects, but nourishing or caring for them. She articulated this interest in the care of the objects again, asking 'who is looking after them when we [the traditional owners] are not there?' (Judy Watson. Interview by author. Brisbane, 28 February 2014). In this context the *holes in the land* series can be read as a form of protection, and therefore care for the objects. The prints provide a context in which the objects are held by a descendant of the people who made them. Furthermore, the darkness of the forms provides a way of protecting the objects from being examined and known too deeply – it is not possible to make out all of the detail or to get a clear understanding of how the forms might look in three dimensions. This reading of the darkness of the forms as protection is supported by Watson's discussions of her earlier series *our bones in your collections…* as a way of shielding the objects depicted from the intense gaze of the viewer (Watson, interview published in Perkins 2010: 68).

As well as engaging with the other objects in *Indigenous Australia*, the holes in the land, engaged with the repatriation debate, hence its placement by the section on museum collecting. Describing the work in its early stages Watson confirmed that, as the title suggest the series explored the removal of the objects from the land to British collections. Watson said that the series was

> related back to that whole idea of things being taken from a country, displaced and suddenly leaving a depression or a mark where they were felt and touched and then collected and taken to another place. (Judy Watson. Interview by author. Brisbane, 28 February 2014).

The description suggests sadness about the loss, but also illustrates Watson's focus on the emotional consequences. It is crucial that Watson is not discussing the emotional lives of the people involved, but those of the objects and the land. Watson did not, however, describe a particular understanding or meaning that she wanted viewers to come away with and she did not want the labels to provide this interpretation. In a more general discussion of her work she explained that she did not want viewers to be led by written information, or their intellectual response, but to have a visceral reaction to her works:

> I think [not having didactic panels] allows the viewer to somehow have an osmosis effect, with the object or the sculpture or the artwork entering into their being and their consciousness. So it sort of enters…I talk about swallowing culture, it enters without them realising it and then they'll start to digest it slowly, bit by bit and it will go in and once its there it can't be erased. (Judy Watson. Interview by author. Brisbane, 28 February 2014).

For Watson therefore the intellectual understanding that the viewer had of the works was less important than the physical and emotional effect, which would have a deeper and more lasting impact. Her comments echo those of Gough, and other artists and curators working in Indigenous Australia and the Pacific who describe the ways contemporary works can act on visitors' emotions in order to bring about new deeper understandings of the material and its history (Gough 2001: 13-15; Hooper et al. 2012).

In the light of Watson's emphasis on visitors visceral, rather than intellectual, responses it is possible to read *the holes in the land* as an emotional articulation of the repatriation debate. The work plays with the idea of damaged beauty, echoing the emotional complexity of the situation of treasured objects being in a distant land. The effect is achieved through the use of the shadow objects to disrupt the visual coherence of the background. When the etchings are viewed from a distance, the objects' intricate lines are lost and they become abrupt black holes in the landscape. The effect stands in contrast to Watson's earlier series, *our bones in your collections…*, in which the objects appear to be part of the forms and contours of the printed landscape (see fig. 66). Even though the visitor may not make a conscious comparison, the effect evokes a real scar in a landscape such as a mine. The complex contradictions of this disrupted beauty, echoes the feelings that accompany the objects themselves, which are, simultaneously, sites of celebration and mourning, of pride and desire, of joy and anger. Rather than weighing in on the intellectual or legal arguments of the repatriation debate, *the holes in the land* tackles the emotions at its heart.

This reading is supported by an earlier interview in which Watson discusses Goya, arguing that his later more political work is so 'powerful' because it of its immediacy. This 'action', she suggests, is the product of the combination of 'those black, dynamic foreground figures and then this romantic ethereal landscape behind' (Watson, interview published in Perkins 2010: 73). 'Possibly' she says 'we are both commenting on our times' (Watson, interview published in Perkins 2010: 73). After *Indigenous Australia* opened Watson spoke more directly about her position on the holding of Indigenous Australian objects in British collections.

> I know that the objects are calling out to come home. They are greatly missed and not every one of our countrymen can come to London to visit them. Australia is a vast country. It is also difficult for our people to get around to search out their heritage in their own country. I don't have an easy solution but I do sense a deep longing for the 'holes in the land' to be filled once again with what belongs there. (Judy Watson, 2015. Contemporary Art Panel Discussion, British Museum, 1 May 2015. Quoted from script provided by Watson. Author's papers).

Watson's words support the concept of the prints as emotional ambassadors in the repatriation debate by illustrating the importance of the deep feeling embedded within the argument. She achieves this, in particular, by demonstrating that intellectual arguments do not override emotional ones. The fact that she still gives importance to the 'deep longing' for the objects to return to their homeland, despite her sympathetic articulation of the logistical and intellectual complexity of the situation, only makes this emotional argument more powerful.

Watson brought this ability to give voice to emotional perspectives to *Indigenous Australia*. While much of the exhibition discussed consequences of the colonial legacy by presenting different narratives and opinions, Watson concentrated instead on the complex emotional lives of the people and the objects involved. She avoided simple intellectual statements and instead encouraged the visitor to experience the work in a visceral way, compelling them to 'swallow' the emotions embedded in the collection. In this way *the holes in the land* added an emotional layer to the diverse historical and intellectual viewpoints about repatriation presented in the quotes and texts in *Out of Country*.

Abe Muriata

Muriata is a Girramay artist from Murray Upper in tropical North Queensland. He is represented by the Girringun Aboriginal Art Centre (GAAC), Cardwell. Muriata works in a number of

mediums including ceramics and waste materials, but he primarily makes the form of rigid basket called jawun, which are unique to his region. Muriata has been described as the best jawun-maker working today (Muriata and Waterson 2016). His jawun are so highly sought after that they are usually sold through the GAAC before they are completed (Muriata and Waterson 2016). Muriata is also an engaging speaker, particularly on the subjects of jawun, his artistic background and his community in the Murray Upper region. His stories are often an extension of his jawun, as they enhance and illuminate knowledge that are embodied in them.

Muriata traces his decision to start making jawun to a particular incident in 1996. His community were preparing to receive a delegation from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), a government body (now dissolved) that represented Indigenous Australian interests. The community struggled to find a gift appropriate to the occasion which would represent the strength and distinctiveness of their way of life. After this, Muriata explained, 'I made it my mission to go out and make a really good jawun' (Muriata and Waterson 2016). Muriata said that he had seen jawun being made as a child, but had not learnt the technique: 'I used to my old grandmother make 'em, but I wasn't actually taught by her' (State Library Queensland and Scragg 2015). Instead Muriata learnt to collect and prepare the lawyer cane vines from an elder in his community and learnt the technique for weaving the baskets from looking at old baskets in the Queensland Museum (Muriata and Waterson 2016). Muriata has spent over fifteen years working on the technique and during a visit to London for the opening week of *Indigenous Australia* he went to look at the jawun at the BM, explaining that there is always more to learn about the form.

Originally the BM proposed to borrow one of Muriata's baskets from the NMA to display in *Indigenous Australia*. Later, it became possible to acquire more contemporary artworks and Muriata was commissioned to make a jawun specifically for the BM in late 2014. He started it immediately and completed it in early 2015. The jawun Muriata made was finely woven with a balanced shape (fig. 75; object ref. 176). When he had finished weaving it he painted it in white and brown ochres (fig. 76). The jawun complements the group of much older jawun in the BM collection, telling the story of the continuation of this tradition.

In *Indigenous Australia* the jawun displayed on its own as the last object and the only object in the final section, *Drawing on Country*. It was set against a backdrop of a long green Perspex sheet, evoking the colours of the tropical rainforest region where the basket was made (fig. 77).

A film of Muriata talking about his story was positioned next to the jawun. In the film Muriata tells the story of how he came to make jawun and talks about the process of collecting and preparing lawyer cane and how he learnt the weaving technique from looking at baskets in museums. He explains that 'I taught myself by going to museums and looking at the real… the old, the ancient artefacts done by real master craftsman, so I can say that I've really been taught by master craftsman, rather than anything else' (British Museum et al. 2015).

One reason why the jawun and the film were placed in this part of the exhibition is that they exemplify the theme of *Drawing on Country*, which explores how contemporary artists draw on museum collections. They also embodied the wider theme of the whole exhibition, by demonstrating the endurance of tradition. Like Watson, Muriata did not describe his aims for being involved in *Indigenous Australia*, or provide a specific meaning for the jawun he made for the exhibition. He did talk about his jawun more generally, however, providing an insight into his work with the BM. Muriata describes the different uses of jawun in the rainforest communities, commenting that they can be used day-to-day for activities such as collecting food and carrying babies, and might only last three years with this kind of use (British Museum et al. 2015). These jawun are left unpainted; the painted jawun, are, he explains very different. He explained that 'once [the jawun] is decorated with traditional colours, with ochres, and traditional design, it becomes a sacred ceremonial gift' (Muriata and Waterson 2016). By painting the jawun he made for the BM Muriata conferred it with this status as a 'sacred ceremonial gift'(Muriata and Waterson 2016). It was a personal and meaningful decision, not only because the BM commission did not specify a painted jawun, but also because many of Muriata's jawun, including those in other museum collection are not painted. As a gift, particularly a sacred one, the jawun takes on a particular meaning and value, becoming a symbol of the relationship, or desired relationship, between Muriata and his community, as the givers and the British Museum as the receivers.

Muriata attended the opening of Indigenous Australia in London. After returning home he wrote a blog post which provides an insight into another function of the jawun as gift. This piece of writing supports the idea that the jawun could facilitate some form of return for Muriata and his community, because Muriata describes the specific outcomes he hoped for from his involvement in the exhibition. As he explained, he encountered benefits as soon as he returned:

> When I returned to Australia [from attending the opening week of *Indigenous Australia*], wherever I went and whoever I met, people recognised me. I don't have a

> facebook account but people said to me, 'you are all over facebook'. I have also had acknowledgement at a Native Title Conference and at other meetings. My involvement in the exhibition has put more spotlight on our rainforest culture and my efforts and those of others to preserve it. (Muriata, Abe. 2015. "*Indigenous Australia*: An Artist's Story" British Museum blog post, now removed. Copy of text in author's papers).

Muriata's description demonstrates how he sought to achieve concrete outcomes for his community from his involvement in *Indigenous Australia*. As he explains wider recognition of his work can have benefits on the ground in terms of receiving support for the community's efforts to preserve rainforest culture (this could include political and financial rewards). His description also illustrates his desire to move the focus away from his personal success on to ways it can help his community continue their traditional practices.

Muriata's explanation of the outcomes he achieved from the exhibition also suggest that, in terms of his aims to provide specific benefits to his community, the Australian response to the exhibition was more important than the British one. The support and recognition that he describes is not a direct outcome of the audience response in London, but rather an outcome of the interest in Australia, at a local level (through social media) and a national level (through the National Native Title Conference, an annual assembly of traditional landowners and politicians. The response of the visitors in London was still, however, important to Muriata. He was keen to promote a wider appreciation of his cultural traditions. 'I've taken my work out of my cultural home, the home of my ancestors' he wrote 'and given it to the world' (Muriata, Abe. 2015. "*Indigenous Australia*: An Artist's Story" British Museum blog post, now removed. Copy of text in author's papers). As the jawun and the film was the last exhibit in the exhibition, Muriata had the final word to the UK audience, leaving them with his hope that his work would encourage more interest in the cultural forms of Girramay people: 'I would like to see [the making of] traditional artefacts come back… It'd be sad if you could only see it in a museum' (British Museum et al. 2015).

Conclusion

It is apt that *Indigenous Australia* ended with Muriata's evocative articulation of the sense of loss embodied in the BM's collection. This loss was also conveyed in many of the other contemporary quotes and artworks in the display. Muriata's statement is also an appropriate

evocation of the wider exhibition because it conveys a sense of the limitations of the museum in interpreting Indigenous Australian material, an overarching theme that ran like a thread through many other parts of the display. In his description this limitation lies in the museums' inability to replicate the complex social and emotional meanings and values a cultural form has when it is being practiced. Other areas of *Indigenous Australia* explore the limitations which are inherent in a British museum holding and interpreting the culture and history of Indigenous communities who faced massive disruption due to Britain's colonial project in Australia. The main way this is achieved is providing multiple opinions on a particular issue (such as repatriation claims), or multiple narratives of a particular event (such as Cook's 1770 landing in Botany Bay). In this way the viewer is provided with an insight into the subjectivity of historical and cultural interpretation.

This approach appears to follow the Phillips' call for museums with colonial collections to embrace multiple narratives (Phillips 2005: 109) and Karp and Katz who suggest museums 'exhibit the problem, not the solution' (Karp and Kratz 2015: 281). It is a distinctly different approach from the one described at the beginning of this chapter in relation to *Aratjara*, an exhibition which took place over twenty years earlier. While *Aratjara* used a particular method of interpretation to encourage a particular understanding of the Indigenous Australian objects on display (that they are contemporary art works), *Indigenous Australia* used a broad range of display methods to encourage an understanding of the complexity of the objects and the narratives they embodied, and the subjectivity of interpreting the materials. The emphasis on multiplicity and on reflexive debate in *Indigenous Australia* suggests that the BM is moving towards a model which focuses on and displaying and engaging with dialogues and discussions, rather than looking for clear solutions to the problems that colonial era collections raise.

5. Consumption

> Museums are agents of ideologies, but visitors are also agents in the process and not empty vessels waiting to be filled.
> (Coffee 2013: 163).

While the academic discussion about the role of colonial era museum collections, particularly those from indigenous and non-Western groups, has developed with increasing nuance and detail (see *Chapter 1*), there is little consideration of the understandings and opinions of museums' audiences. There are two compelling reasons to do so. The first is that these collections are often held at institutions with public ownership, therefore there is a mandate to include audiences in these debates. The second is that, as audiences are often largely drawn from citizens of the nation state which holds the collection, they also share in the histories of the colonial era. This is why contemporary exhibitions on these collections often aim to increase audiences' knowledge of colonial era histories and to challenge prejudices emanating from them. Considering audience experiences not only provides information on whether these aims are successful, it also incorporates audiences into the wider debate, recognising, as Coffee explains, that audiences create meanings and understandings of their own.

Exhibitions provide an opportunity to interrogate audience opinions on colonial era collections as they are the arena where audiences are most likely to encounter such collections and discussions of their histories. This chapter therefore analyses audience responses to *Indigenous Australia*, in order to gain insight into their understandings of the BM's Indigenous Australian collection and the histories it embodies, as well as to understand their opinions of the exhibition itself. In doing so this chapter aims to incorporate these experiences and understandings into the wider debate over the role of museum collections in relation to the colonial legacy.

In addressing the initial question – what was the audience experience of *Indigenous Australia*? – I break 'experience' into 'satisfaction' and 'understanding'. In order to determine 'satisfaction' I identify audience sentiment expressed in relation to the exhibition (positive, negative, neutral). In order to interrogate audience 'understanding' I identify the aspects or areas of the exhibition that audiences were interested in, and their opinions and experiences of these areas. As discussed in the methodology section below, the analysis of understanding uses participants' unstructured, unsolicited comments to identify topics of interest. This approach

allows for an overview of the aspects of the exhibition that were significant to different audiences. From this overview of satisfaction and understanding a narrower discussion emerges of audiences' response to particular themes and content in *Indigenous Australia*. This discussion focuses, in particular, on audiences' experiences and understandings of the colonial legacy and how it was presented.

The analysis uses three different data sets, two of which (Twitter data and comments cards) are unusual in studies of museum audiences. Each data set is drawn from a different segment of the BM audience (both onsite and online). As the data sets are so distinct a nuanced approach must be taken to the analysis, and to the interpretation of findings. The data sources and the approaches taken are discussed in detail below.

Source 1: MHM survey

The first set of data comes from a secondary source, an analysis of visitor experience within the *Indigenous Australia* exhibition space, conducted by cultural heritage research consultancy organisation Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (MHM), commissioned by the BM. This took the form of a survey, accessed on a tablet device, placed at the end of the exhibition and available from 9 June – 2 August 2015 (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 32) Participants were therefore drawn from general visitors to the exhibition. They had the option to fill out the survey in the exhibition, or email a copy to themselves to fill out at a later date (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 32). This resulted in a sample of 164 exit surveys and 7 online surveys. MHM calculated the reliability, 'based on sample size and population at +/-7.64% at 50%' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 32). MHM produced a detailed report on a number of different areas, but particularly focused on marketing and on profiling visitors according to their audience segmentation system (see *Chapter 3*). While this is valuable to the BM much of the information provided is not relevant to the questions that this chapter asks. For this reason I use the MHM report to consider the popularity of the exhibition onsite, the basic demographics of onsite visitors (age, nationality etc.) and levels of visitor satisfaction.

Source 2: feedback cards and emails

The second data source is unsolicited feedback about *Indigenous Australia* sent to the BM by audience members. These took the form of 31 emails to the BM and 47 feedback cards, which are A5 cards, with a space for comment, which visitors can pick up at the Information Desk in

the Great Court of the BM. These comments were collected from the press announcement on 22 January to the close of the exhibition on 02 August 2015.

BP Sponsorship protest cards

On 19 July 2015, protesters from the group 'BP or not BP' staged a dramatic performance in the Great Court of the British Museum. During the protest, performers handed out feedback cards and ninety-five were filled in and returned to the Information Desk. This was an important expression of audience opinion on this topic. The protest took place during the dates *Indigenous Australia* was open, and the protesters commented that *Indigenous Australia* was sponsored by BP. BP are, however, a general sponsor for the museum, and the majority of the comments cards which came in during this protest did not mention the exhibition. Reference to the exhibition was one of the criteria for inclusion of cards in my survey. This caused an interesting dilemma as I did not want to change the criteria based on an assumption of implicit reference to the exhibition on the part of individual commentators, even though the organisers of the protest may have had this in mind. Furthermore, inclusion of this group would obscure how many comments on sponsorship came in outside of this protest, and with specific relation to the *Indigenous Australia* exhibition. For this reason I have not incorporated the ninety-five protest cards in my main breakdown of feedback by topic (ills. 14 & 15). In order to properly acknowledge this selection of feedback, I do however provide a separate breakdown, in the section on sponsorship, which details the percentage of comments on sponsorship, if these ninety-five comments are included in the whole.

Source 3: Twitter data

From the official press announcement on 22 January to the close on 02 August 2015, there were over 10,000 comments relating to Enduring Civilisation on the social media platform Twitter. The vast majority of these were audience responses to British Museum tweets, but there were also over 200 spontaneous original comments from Twitter users who had been to the exhibition or read news coverage related to it. In addition to the comments themselves the Twitter data included information on which tweets related to the exhibition were the most popular, based on the number of times they had been liked, retweeted (forwarded to other users), or replied to.

Defining a complex audience

All of the participants in the MHM survey attended *Indigenous Australia* onsite. I refer to these participants as 'onsite visitors'. The Twitter participants include two types of audiences, those

who visited the exhibition both onsite and online, and those who only encountered the exhibition online. It is not always possible to ascertain which category participants fall into. Feedback cards and emails also came from both onsite visitors and those who were aware of the exhibition, but did not visit. The content of these comments indicates that the majority came from visitors to the exhibition onsite, but as with the Twitter data, there is no way of knowing the exact number. When referring generally to both the Twitter audience and the feedback card and email audience, therefore, I simply consider them to be a segment of the BM's audience, in its widest sense, including the audience for online engagement in the UK and abroad. Another way of describing this would be as the museum's global public. In doing so I follow the BM's own construction of itself as a 'museum of the world, for the world', with an audience which is global, rather than being limited to those who physically visit the museum site in Bloomsbury (British Museum 2006: 2).

Methodology

The methodology for the MHM survey is described above. This section details the methodology used for my original analysis of data from feedback cards and emails, and Twitter.

Recruitment and sampling

Participants in both the Twitter survey and the feedback card and email survey were self-selecting. This contrasts with the range of participants in the MHM survey, which represent a sample of onsite visitors to *Indigenous Australia*, and aimed to be representative of the overall visitor demographics, as described above. As they are both self-selecting groups it is highly likely that the demographics of these two groups of participants would differ from the overall demographics of onsite visitors, of the BM's online audience and of the wider BM audience. The conclusions drawn from these sources do not therefore represent a cross section of overall audience experience, but are instead an insight into the experiences of *some* audience members.

The sample, for both the feedback card and email survey, and the Twitter survey, was of all the original comments received on *Indigenous Australia* during the time period of the study. In the case of the feedback cards and emails this means that the sample was every feedback card and email received (omitting those received in the sponsorship protest discussed below). In the case of the Twitter comments, this means that the sample includes every original, unsolicited tweet

which referred to the exhibition (using the hashtag #IndigenousAustralia), but does not include retweets (in which a user forwards another user's tweet to their followers) or replies (in which a user replies to another user's tweet on the topic). The Twitter data includes the number of retweets or replies each of these tweets had from other Twitter users. This was obtained in order to ascertain how popular individual tweets on the exhibition were. The Twitter sample also includes broader data related to the BM Twitter account, in the form of data on the popularity of BM tweets during the time period. This data includes the text of all BM tweets during this period and how often they were retweeted by other Twitter users. The aim of this was to ascertain how popular BM tweets relating to *Indigenous Australia* were in relation to the Museum's tweets on other topics.

Analysis

The majority of academic sources on social media in museums are theoretical discussions about its uses and values (Kidd 2014), or practical advice and case studies illustrating how to engage audiences using these methods (Lessard, Whiffin, and Wild 2017; Suzic, Karlicek, and Stritesky 2016), with some edited volumes combining these two forms (Drotner and Schrøder 2013; MuseumsEtc 2010, 2012). There are few published studies of audience responses to specific institutions and their activities. Those that do exist tend to focus on profiling audiences online, and asking how, and how effectively, museums are engaging audiences, particularly for the purposes of marketing (Arta Moro et al. 2017; Hausmann 2012). There are almost no studies which use social media to explore deeper audience experiences of either online content, or an onsite visit to the museum, with a study of visitor experience at Tate Modern by Elena Villaespesa being a notable exception (Villaespesa 2013). Similarly there are few published studies of other sources of unstructured visitor feedback in museums, for example, analysis of letters, emails, and comments in visitor books and feedback forms (Coffee 2007, 2013).

Existing studies which aim to interrogate visitor experience through social media tend to use a content analysis approach, with a researcher evaluating the data (Hausmann 2012; Villaespesa 2013). Content analysis has also been used in studies of other unstructured audience feedback, such as visitor books, which are similar to the feedback cards and emails used in this study (Coffee 2013). Hausmann (2012) uses content analysis techniques to establish popular topics and types of post (e.g. quizzes) on a museum's social media account in order to evaluate the effectiveness of social media as a marketing tool. The works of Villaespesa (2013) and Coffee (2013) have aims that are closer to mine, that is to establish topics of interest to ascertain the

kinds of experiences visitors had in the museum. Content analysis, which is a qualitative research technique for making inferences from texts, is particularly appropriate for asking these questions about unstructured feedback (Krippendorff 2004: 18). This is because it allows trends to be identified in texts, using a technique which is replicable and reduces potential of bias (Krippendorff 2004: 18; Silverman 2014: 11). Content analysis is also appropriate for this study and this data set as it is designed to analyse texts that were not created specifically for the analyst, and it is suitable for ascertaining the meaning of the creator, rather than answering specific questions designed in advance (Krippendorff 2004).

This study initially uses the content analysis approach referred to as 'summative' content analysis (Hsiu-Fang and Shannon 2005: 1283). This approach makes inferences from the data set by identifying key words and topics (Hsiu-Fang and Shannon 2005: 1283-5). As some of this identification process relies on the analyst interpreting the intent of the comment (rather than simply counting words) it is a qualitative technique, with the potential for bias (Hsiu-Fang and Shannon 2005: 1285). Potential for bias was limited by establishing parameters for each of the questions asked, as described below. The first phase of the summative analysis of this data established sentiment. The second identified a main topic area for each comment. The coding used is described in more detail below.

For the analysis of sentiment each piece of data (individual comment card, email and tweet) was coded according to four predetermined categories: positive, negative, neutral or mixed. The coding was based initially on key words and phrases (for example, 'great time' would be marked positive, 'disappointed' negative), but final decisions were made by an assessment of overall sentiment. Overall sentiment was determined by interpretation of what the main subject of the card was, and whether the author was positive or negative about this main subject. For example, comments which explained that a participants were having a 'great time', but this was ruined by a particular experience would be marked negative, as the overall intent of the comment was to act as a complaint. Comments which included a genuine expression of a range of opinions were marked 'mixed' (for example a feedback card which listed different aspects of the interpretation, some of which were praised and others criticised).

For the analysis of topic or theme the process was more complex. Each piece of data was read and assigned an initial main topic of comment. The whole data set was then reviewed in order to establish similarities in topics. From these similarities new topics were established, which

encompassed a range of comments. A coding system then provided each topic with parameters that the comment had to meet in order to be included. For example, the topic of the exhibition sponsorship included the parameters that the tweet would include the words 'sponsorship', 'funding' or the name of the sponsor, 'BP' or 'British Petroleum'. Comments were then reviewed again, and assigned new codes if necessary. The process was repeated in order to ensure greater accuracy and to identify whether topics could be divided into subtopics. Often, as in the case of comments about sponsorship, the topic or theme of the comment was clear. In some cases more inference had to be made as to what the topic was. I have addressed these cases, explaining the decisions I made and why, as they arise in the text below.

The basis of this chapter is the content analysis, but it also includes other methods. After establishing trends in visitor experience I then interrogate individual comments in more detail, using broader theories of museum practice. A small proportion of the Twitter analysis also uses quantitative methods – counting the number of responses – to establish the popularity of certain tweets.

Ethical review

The ethical basis of using visitor feedback cards and emails is composed of three factors, designed to ensure minimal risk to participants (Economic and Social Research Council (Great Britain) 2015). Firstly, participants provided comments to the BM as feedback on the *Indigenous Australia* exhibition. This study uses these comments in the context for which they were intended - to help understand visitor experience of the exhibition. The second principle that reduces the risk of harm is that all features which could be used to identify participants have been removed from the data sources and from quotes. The third principle is that the comments are related to a topic (the *Indigenous Australia* exhibition) that is low risk, as it is unlikely to touch on information which would be personal or sensitive (Economic and Social Research Council Great Britain 2015: 4). There were no comments in the data set which contained information of this type.

In contrast to the comments cards the Twitter data was taken from the public domain. In theory this suggests that it is less problematic, but as it carries a small possibility of participants being identified, it requires deeper consideration. Existing studies of Twitter data in museums tend to conclude that the content is in the public domain and take no further action regarding ethics and consent (for example Hausmann 2012; Villaespesa 2013) . In doing so these authors emphasise

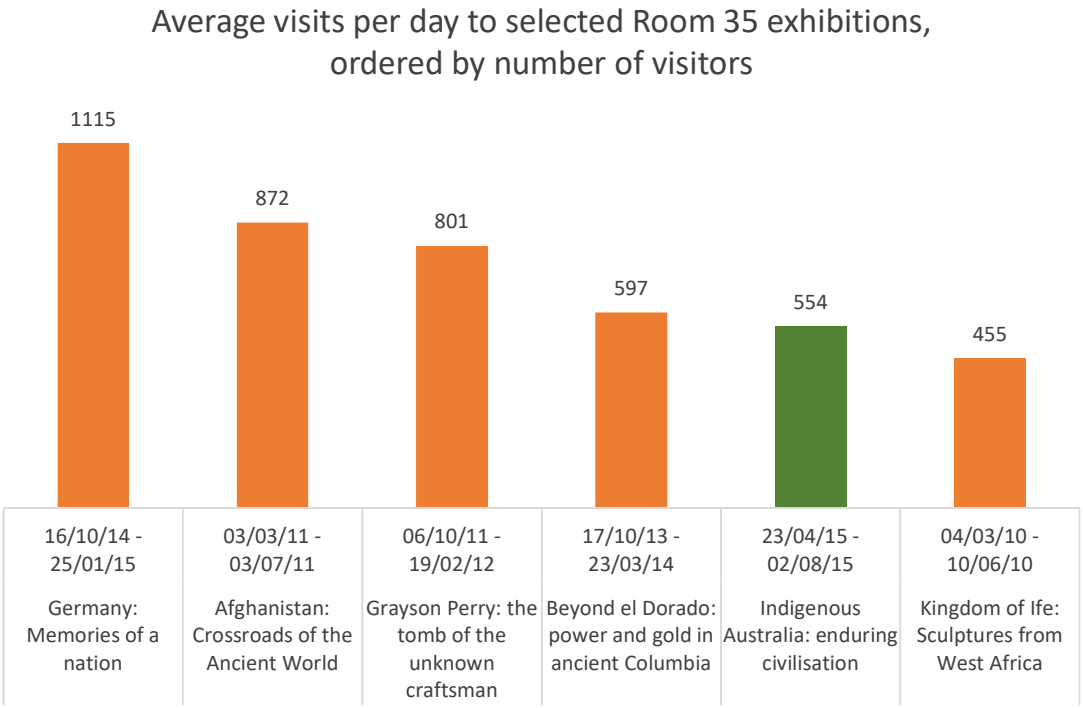
that they follow Twitter's Terms of Service, which all contributors agree to when opening an account. This documents states that 'this license is you authorizing us to make your tweets on the Twitter Services available to the rest of the world and to let others do the same'(Twitter 2015a). The website also explicitly states to users that their posts in the public domain may be used for a variety of purposes, including by researchers at universities (Twitter 2015b). Despite this some individuals and research organisations consider the issue of consent to be more complex. The Economic and Social Research Council (Great Britain) explains that 'people often assume that social media sources are public domain, but it is quite likely that some service users – including children – may not understand the implications of what they are doing...' and recommends ethical review of social media research for this reason (Economic and Social Research Council Great Britain 2015: 12). UEA's 'reference guide to ethics issues' also stipulates that ethical review must be undertaken for social media research to ensure that participants are protected and data is used correctly.

Taking into account these recommendations, I have chosen an ethical approach which is based on the context and the type of data being used. I have deemed the overall use of the data to be low risk, and in accordance with the intentions of the participants (Twitter users), because all of the tweets in question addressed the BM directly (using the @BritishMuseum hashtag) and were, therefore, clearly designed to be a form of open communication for the BM and for other social media users to read and respond to. This is a widely acknowledged function of museum Twitter accounts (Landon 2010) and of Twitter more broadly (van Dijck 2011: 337). As with the other forms of comment, the authors of these tweets intended them to be feedback on the *Indigenous Australia* exhibition, and my analysis uses them for this purpose. After establishing this basic principle I took further steps to minimise harm to participants by establishing a strategy for using material and seeking consent. For anonymous data sets used to interrogate trends, and for quotations which illustrate general trends, I did not consult individuals, as they would not be identified. When I have quoted tweets I have taken a case-by-case approach. I approached individuals who engaged in dialogue with the BM on a particular issue. I asked their consent to use the text and followed their wishes on whether the account name was used. I did not approach anyone under the age of 18 (there are no recorded tweets from children regarding the exhibition). I did not seek consent to quote tweets to illustrate generic 'types' of visitor comment or in the use of tweets which had little potential to be contentious. I do not quote the name of the Twitter account in these comments. I also did not seek consent in the use of the tweets of public facing organisations and individuals, including museums, newspapers

and protest groups, as the organisations and individuals associated with them use Twitter as a marketing, PR and communication tool and are therefore clearly aware of the public nature of the medium and the possible implications of this. I did however obtain the support of the British Museum itself as the prime focus of this study.

In every decision made regarding consent and ethics, the prime consideration has been limiting risk of harm to participants. Prior to starting the research I undertook a full ethical review for both parts of original analysis,[34] based on the guidelines of the ESRC and UEA.

Results



Ill. 3. Average no. of visits per day to selected Room 35 exhibitions at the British Museum (Data from Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 3).

[34] The MHM survey would have been subject to their own ethical review processes and those of the BM.

Popularity

Onsite popularity

Indigenous Australia received 59,287 ticketed visits over its entire opening period (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 2). [35] This equates to a daily average of 554 visits. This places *Indigenous Australia* in the same range as two of the previous exhibitions in the same space (ill. 3). *Beyond El Dorado: Power and Gold in Ancient Colombia* (2014) had an average of 597 visits a day and *Kingdom of Ife: Sculptures from West Africa* (2010) had 455 (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 3). Other exhibitions in Room 35 had a higher daily turn-out, notably *Grayson Perry: The Tomb of An Unknown Craftsman* (2012) had 801 visits a day, *Afghanistan: Crossroads of the Ancient World* (2011) had 872 and *Germany: Memories of a Nation*, the exhibition which preceded *Indigenous Australia* (October 2014-January 2015), had more than twice the visitors, with a daily count of 1,115 (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 3). The visitor numbers for these exhibitions were however regarded as extraordinary, with MHM describing *Indigenous Australia* having a 'usual frequency' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 10).

One reason why *Indigenous Australia* may not have achieved the very high visitor numbers of some exhibitions in Room 35 is that it did not have the high profile of other topics. The most visited exhibitions, *Afghanistan*, *Germany* and *Grayson Perry* featured topics which were prominent in the media or which were associated with well-known personalities. *Afghanistan* coincided with an important year in the war in Afghanistan, which included the death of Osama bin Laden. *Germany* coincided with the 25th anniversary of German reunification and was tied to a BBC Radio 4 series, developed and narrated by Neil MacGregor, the BM's well known and popular Director (now retired from the role), who has been referred to as a 'national treasure' (for example in Hoggard 2006; Thomson 2015; Whitworth 2017). Similarly *Grayson Perry* was curated by the well-known British artist and television presenter whose name was attached to the exhibition. In many ways therefore these were exceptional exhibitions, which would have touched on areas potential visitors already had an awareness of, and it is problematic to judge the popularity of *Indigenous Australia* against them. The comparison is still valuable, however, because it suggests the high extent to which visitors' familiarity with a topic influences their decision to visit an exhibition. It is possible, therefore, that BM audiences'

[35] Unless otherwise stated all data relating to physical visits to British Museum exhibitions (as opposed to data from Twitter or feedback cards) are taken from Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (2015).

lack of general knowledge about Indigenous Australia, which was revealed in the formative evaluation (see *Chapter 3*), proved a barrier to their attendance of the exhibition. In this context, *Indigenous Australia* should be viewed as a successful exhibition in relation to its topic. This is supported by the fact that visitor numbers far surpassed the target of 40,000 ticketed visits, demonstrating that visitors were more engaged with the topic than anticipated.

Online popularity

From the press launch that announced the exhibition on 22 January to its close on 2 August, there were 10,007 recorded tweets which mentioned *Indigenous Australia*. This figure, referred to as the number of 'mentions', includes original tweets about the exhibition as well as retweets and replies. Compared with other BM topics mentioned on Twitter during these seven months this is a high number. As illustration 3 shows *Indigenous Australia* was the fourth most mentioned topic during this period. While this initially suggests that the exhibition had a relatively high level of popularity online it is worth noting that *Defining Beauty*, the other paid temporary exhibition of the period, received almost twice as many mentions (19,245). Furthermore, the topic 'Roman' was also more popular than *Indigenous Australia* with British Museum online audiences during the period, being mentioned 10,392 times, despite the fact that there were no specific activities related to ancient Rome.

	Topic	No. of Twitter mentions
1	on this day	37,719
2	DefiningBeauty	19,245
3	Roman	10,392
4	IndigenousAustralia	10,007
5	Discover	8,082
6	Great	7,313
7	London	5,388
8	ancient Greek	5,003
9	Roman emperor	5,003
10	BP	4,618

Ill. 4. Top 10 topics on the British Museum Twitter account 22 January 2015 – 03 August 2015. NB. Twitter mentions refers to the number of individual tweets (including retweets and replies) that mention the topics. The topic 'on this day' comprises all tweets related to the British

Museum's category of tweets which describe a historical event that happened on the day in question and relate this to a BM event or object in the BM collection.

Indigenous Australia appears less popular when online interest is measured by ranking the popularity of the British Museum's individual tweets (rather than the popularity of certain topics) during the same period (ill. 5). This analytical system is a better gauge of popularity than 'mentions' in this context, because it compensates for the BM's heavy promotion of exhibitions on Twitter.[36] Ranked by the number of retweets, the most successful tweet on *Indigenous Australia* during this period comes in at number 265. This is well below the most popular tweet on *Defining Beauty* (number forty-three) and below twenty-eight tweets on the topic of ancient Rome (none of which related to a current exhibition). As with the onsite visitor numbers the Twitter data suggests that online audiences found it difficult to engage with Indigenous Australian subject matter, and were much more interested in topics that (it can be presumed) they already had some general knowledge about. Existing interest in a subject area appears to be one of the most important factors in exhibition popularity.

[36] It is possible for a topic to receive a high number of mentions simply because it has been heavily promoted by the BM. Most BM tweets will receive some degree of audience interest so if the BM produces a lot of tweets about a particular topic and each tweet receives a certain amount of audience attention, it will appear to be a popular topic, even if each individual tweet is not particularly popular.

	Full Text	No. of retweets	No. of replies
1	The Roman emperor Hadrian and his lover Antinous are side by side in Room 77	934	39
2	Beware the Ides of March! Julius Caesar was assassinated #onthisday in 44 BC	919	30
3	April is named after Aprillis, the Roman goddess of mischief	859	52
4	Discovered #onthisday in 1799: the Rosetta Stone – key to deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphs!	817	14
5	Beatrix Potter was born #onthisday in 1866. Here are some of her flopsy bunnies!	800	21
6	This penny from 1903 is stamped with the suffragette slogan 'votes for women'	735	8
7	Michelangelo was born #onthisday in 1475. Here's a selection of his magnificent drawings	715	14
8	Hokusai died #onthisday in 1849. Here's his famous colour woodblock print 'The Great Wave'	700	19
9	Today is the longest day in the northern hemisphere – here's the #SummerSolstice at Stonehenge	614	18
10	It's #WorldPoetryDay! This poem was one of the first decoded pieces of Egyptian literature	603	24
43	Michelangelo died #onthisday in 1564. See his beautiful drawing of Adam in #DefiningBeauty	412	16
265	#IndigenousAustralia is now open! Discover a remarkable 60,000 years of continuous culture	193	6

Ill. 5 Tweets from the BM account, ranked according to popularity (based on number of retweets) 22 January 2015 – 03 August 2015. NB in the original each tweet was accompanied by a relevant image.

Summary: popularity

The twitter analysis reveals familiar subject areas to be one of the central factors in audience engagement. In doing so it provides a deeper context in which to consider the onsite visitor numbers for *Indigenous Australia*. The Twitter data supports the hypothesis that unfamiliarity with the topic was a barrier to *Indigenous Australia* receiving the unusually high visitor numbers of some other Room 35 exhibitions. The Twitter data also suggests that audiences would have been biased towards visiting other exhibits available at the same time as *Indigenous Australia.* During the time *Indigenous Australia* was open onsite visitors to the BM would have been able to see a number of free and ticketed displays on ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt, some of the most popular topic areas for the Twitter audience. In this context the BM's target of 40,000 visits seems reasonable, and it is striking that the exhibition exceeded this by almost 20,000.

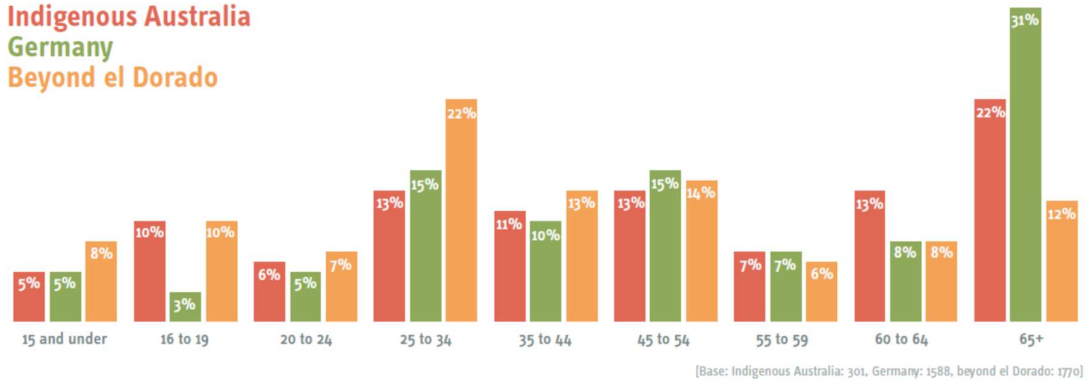
Profile

MHM survey: Onsite visitors

As discussed in the methodology section above neither the Twitter data, nor the feedback card and email data provides the opportunity to obtain information about audience characteristics. The MHM survey, however, provides a profile of onsite visitors. The majority were repeat visitors (81%) from the UK (69%) who had a general knowledge of the topic (64%) (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 4). As illustration 5 demonstrates the largest age group was visitors over sixty-five, who made up 22% of the overall visitors, with 42% aged over fifty (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 4-7). 96% of visitors described their ethnicity as white (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 6). While young families were targeted as a key audience for the exhibition, families only made up 6% of visitors, a figure that was towards the lower end of the normal range for Room 35 exhibitions and suggests that marketing may not have reached this target audience (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 8). MHM report that this onsite audience was similar to the usual visitor profile for a Room 35 exhibition (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 7). A few small exceptions to the usual visitor profile are discussed below, but the typicality of the audience is perhaps the most interesting finding of the profile. It might have been expected that with content and narratives that were unusual for the BM (including not only Indigenous Australia, but also the focus on colonial history and the role of museums, see *Chapter 2*) *Indigenous Australia* would appeal to new or underrepresented audiences, but in the

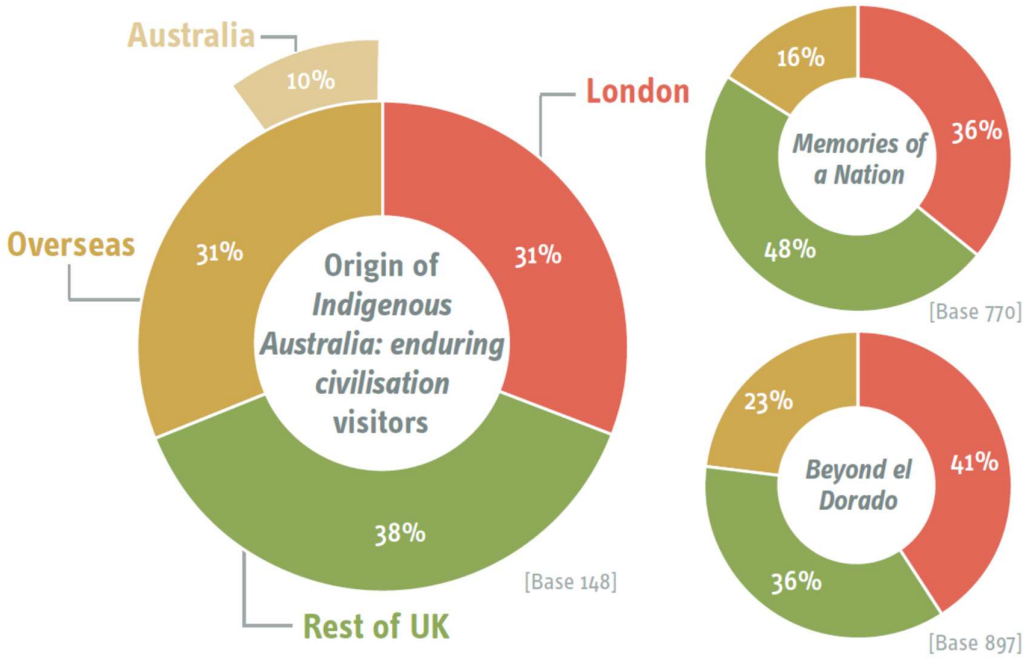
end its appeal lay with the Museum's traditional audience of highly active museum goers with established expectations for their visit.

The usual BM audience profile is only significantly disrupted in two areas. The first is a higher than average proportion of visitors aged between 16-24 (16% compared to 8% at Germany, the previous exhibition in the same space) and the second is high number of overseas visitors (31% compared to 16% for Germany) (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 5). The first statistic should be treated with caution. MHM celebrated the result as 'one of the highest proportion of visits by visitors in this age group recorded at a paid exhibition at the British Museum' (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 7). The suggestion is that there could be a greater interest in the topic among this age group. Without a clear indication of why this exhibition may have appealed to young people it seems more likely, however, that the result is due to unacknowledged bias in the sample. As the survey method was an ipad and respondents self-selected, the high proportion of 16-24 year olds could merely reflect the higher level of engagement of this age group with the technology on which the survey was conducted (See Deloitte LLP 2017: 10 for demographics of smart device users). The second unusual result, the high number of overseas visitors is more interesting (and has less indications of bias). A third of these overseas visits (and 10% of all visits) were from people who normally resided in Australia, a group that made up only 5% of the overall visitors to the Museum during this period (ill. 7) (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 6). [37] Assuming that Australian visitors would have a greater knowledge of Indigenous Australian material than visitors from other nations, this supports the earlier hypothesis that audiences are inclined to engage with exhibitions on topics about which they already have some knowledge.



[37] From my own conversations with visitors I suspect that there were also a significant number of Australian immigrants, and people with Australian heritage, who were not included in this figure because they were resident in Europe.

Ill. 6. Age of audience chart from MHM report (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 7).



Ill. 7. Origin of onsite audience chart from MHM report (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 5).

Visitor satisfaction comparator table	Indigenous Australia: enduring civilisation	Germany: Memories of a Nation	Beyond el Dorado: power and gold in ancient Colombia
Overall rating			
Excellent	49%	45%	54%
Good	35%	38%	34%
Fair / OK	10%	11%	9%
Poor	4%	3%	2%
Very poor	2%	2%	1%

Ill. 8 Visitor satisfaction table from MHM report (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 23).

Sentiment

MHM survey: visitor satisfaction

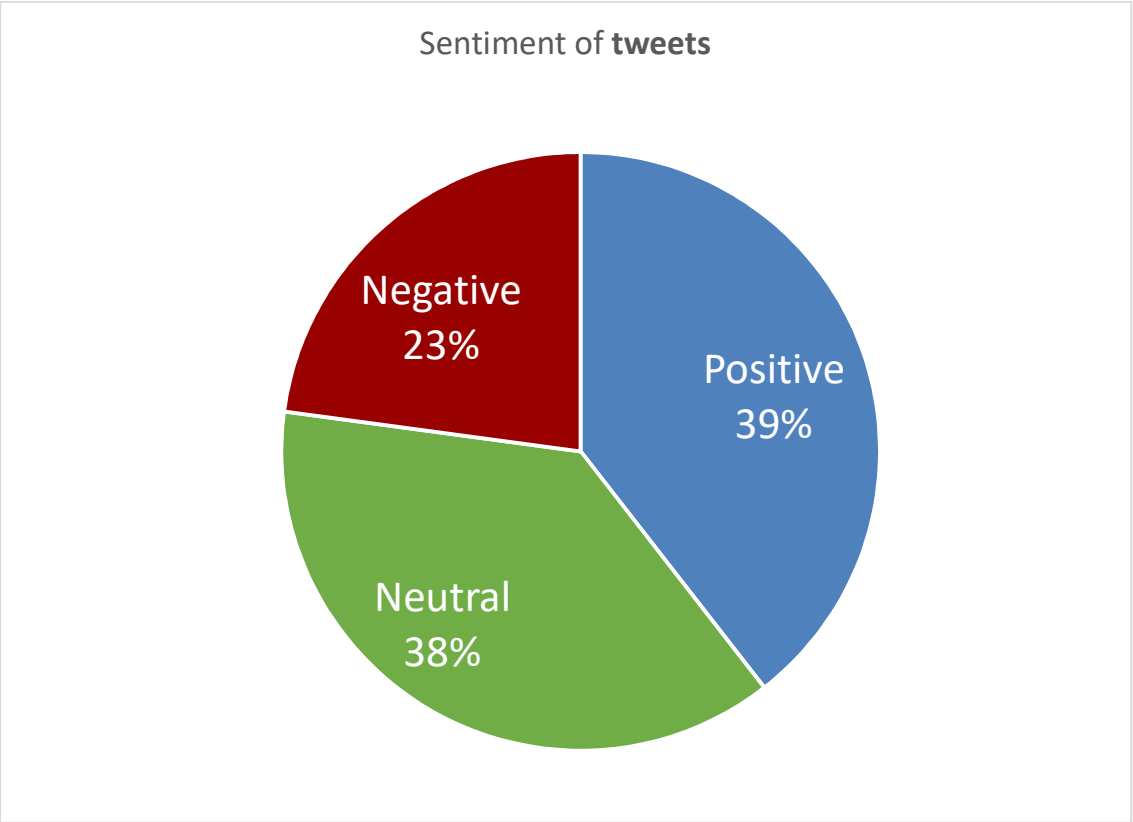
The majority of onsite visitors who took part in the MHM survey were positive about their experience of Enduring Civilisation with 85% of people rating the exhibition as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ and only 6% as poor or very poor (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 23). This figure

is similar to that of other exhibitions in the space (ill. 8) (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 23).

Twitter sentiment

A review of all of the original tweets on the exhibition (as opposed to retweets, or other repeated comments) indicates a generally positive response with 39% of the comments being positive as opposed to 23% negative (ill. 9). The majority of the other responses (designated as neutral or n/a) were statements indicating the person had visited the exhibition, or would like to visit the exhibition. While these comments could not be rated as either positive or negative because they did not explicitly express an opinion, I would argue that they were largely endorsements, as they constituted a form of publicity for the exhibition. This suggests that the overall sentiment was much more positive than negative.

While the online response was more positive than negative there was still a higher proportion of negative comments on Twitter than there were negative responses in the MHM onsite survey. This indicates that the online audience viewed *Indigenous Australia* less favourably than the onsite audience. One possible reason for this disparity is that Twitter is regarded as a platform for raising concerns and criticisms, especially of large institutions, so there could be a bias towards providing negative comments. It is also likely that the Twitter response was less positive because many negative comments could be classed as ideological objections based on the authors' perception of the BM and its activities. These people would be less likely to attend the exhibition as paying visitors as this would constitute a form of support for the institution. The comparison between onsite and online results suggests, therefore, that *Indigenous Australia* was well received by those who visited the exhibition space, and that issues and concerns came from other segments of the wider audience for BM activities.



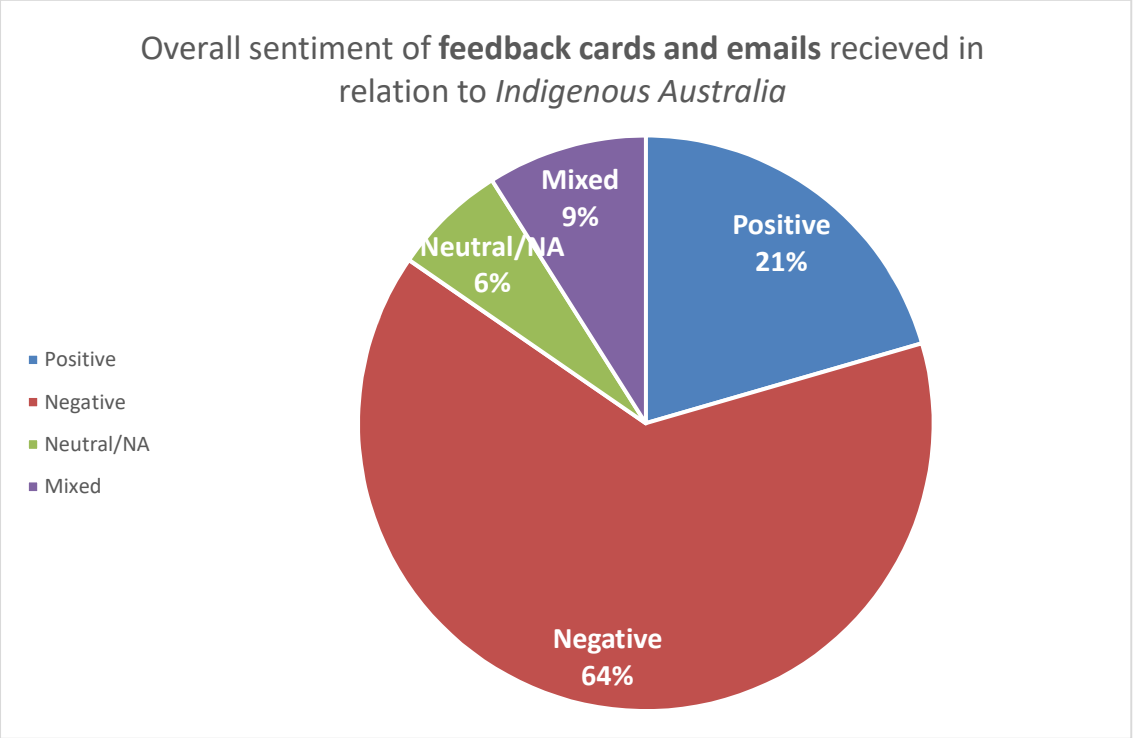
Ill. 9.

Feedback card and email sentiment

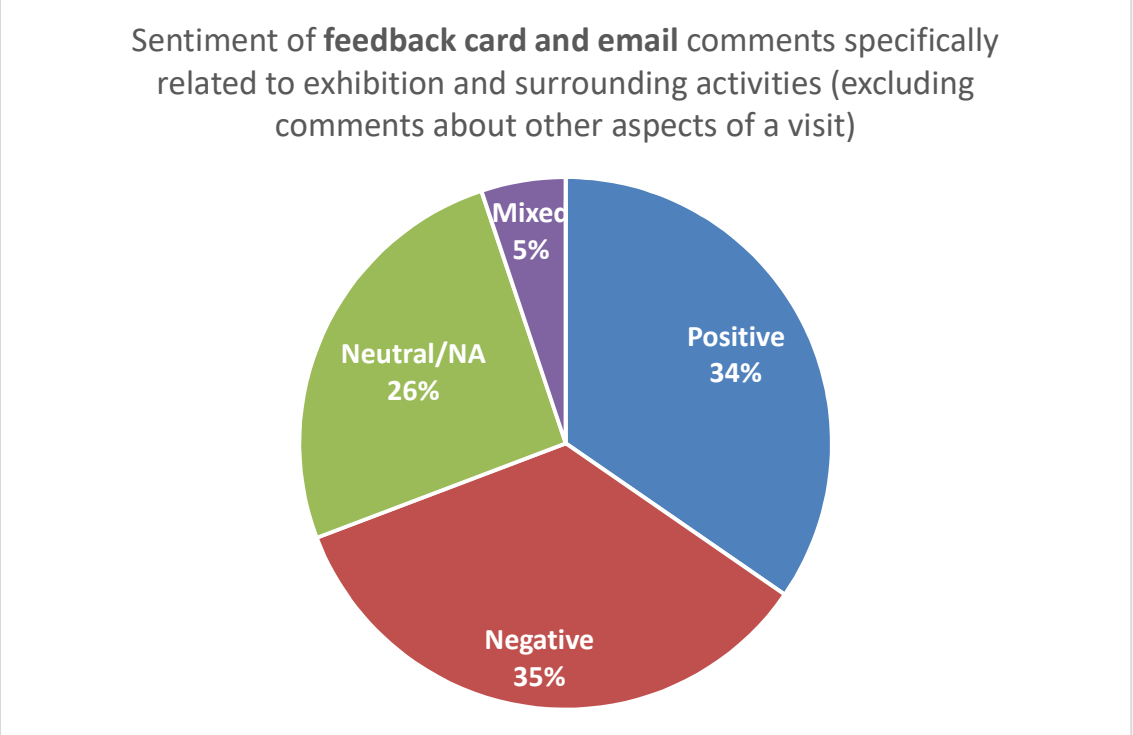
As with the online survey the sentiment of feedback cards and emails should not be taken as evidence of overall audience sentiment, as they represent a self-selected portion of the audience. It is likely that audiences are more motivated to take the time to provide unsolicited feedback to raise complaints and concerns than to offer praise. This is likely to be the reason why the overall opinion expressed in feedback cards and emails is much less favourable than the MHM and Twitter surveys with 59% of feedback having a negative main subject and only 19% a positive main subject (ill. 10).[38] 15% of the comments were mixed, indicating a genuine balance of positive and negative expressions. A closer review of the content reveals however that many negative pieces of feedback (29% of the overall figure) were not about the exhibition itself, but about other aspects of a visit to the museum, such as toilet facilities, opening times and access (see ill. 14). Often these pieces of feedback were otherwise complementary about the exhibition itself (for example a card which began 'Excellent exhibition, BUT…' and then took the form of an extensive complaint about facilities was classed as a negative, because the complaint

[38] When the cards from the protest against BP sponsorship are added (see section on BP sponsorship below) the satisfaction level is much lower with 9 positive and 84 negative.

about facilities was the main subject of the card). There is some value therefore to analysing all of the feedback based solely on comments about *Indigenous Australia* (even when it was not the main subject of the card, (ill. 10). When the feedback cards and emails are interrogated in this way the sentiment appears more balanced. 26% of comments are categorised as not applicable, because they only included comments about facilities and access outside of the exhibition space, such as a visitor explaining they visited *Indigenous Australia*, but only discussing the BM's toilet facilities. Of the remaining comments 35% conveyed positive sentiments about an aspect of the exhibition itself and 33% negative ones.



Ill. 10. Author's chart



Ill. 11 Author's chart

MHM survey: visitor understanding

The MHM report provides little detail on visitors' deeper opinions and experiences of *Indigenous Australia*. Much of the focus was on questions more relevant to marketing, such as how visitors found out about the exhibition. There was, however, a breakdown of visitor responses to some aspects of the exhibition, which provide some details about how positively or negatively visitors engaged with different components (ills. 11 &12) (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 21-22). This data provides two deeper insights into visitor opinion on the exhibition. The first is that visitors were more positive about the exhibition content, narrative and design, than with space and movement around the exhibition. The majority of visitors were satisfied with 'film content' (81% satisfied), 'amount of information' (81% satisfied), 'tone of information and language used' (82% satisfied) and 'themes / storyline / narrative' of the exhibition (78% satisfied). Slightly fewer visitors were satisfied with the exhibition 'flow' (72% satisfied), and the number of visitors in the space (64% satisfied). This suggests that a proportion of the negative responses to *Indigenous Australia* were the result of issues to do with space and movement around the exhibition, two ongoing issues with the difficult space of Room 35. Visitors were, however, less negative about this than in other recent exhibitions, indicating that the design went some way towards combatting the limitations of the space.

The second deeper insight that the MHM survey provides is in the visitor response to the narrative and interpretation of the exhibition. Overall the visitor satisfaction for this element of *Indigenous Australia* was high, but the MHM report notes that the number of dissatisfied responses was also slightly higher than for some other BM exhibitions (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 27). MHM suggest that this group of dissatisfied visitors wanted more in-depth information, but the report provides no evidence for this (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 27). While this does not mean that it is incorrect it also does not rule out other possible reasons for visitor dissatisfaction with the narrative. Given that one of the central aims of *Indigenous Australia* was to represent difficult histories and the ongoing, often highly emotive debates about issues surrounding the colonial legacy (such as the holding of Indigenous Australian objects in British collections), one possible reason is that the small proportion of visitors who were dissatisfied with the narrative were reacting to this element of the content. As these are highly emotive, contentious and often polarised issues, it might be expected that these areas of the narrative could prompt a broader range of opinions among the audience than exhibitions on

less sensitive topics. This hypothesis is explored in the section of this chapter on text, narrative and interpretation.

Visitor satisfaction comparator table	*Indigenous Australia: enduring civilisation*	*Germany: Memories of a Nation*	*Beyond el Dorado: power and gold in ancient Colombia*
Layout / flow of the exhibition			
Enhanced	72%	57%	75%
Neither	19%	26%	17%
Detracted	8%	16%	8%
Ambience of the exhibition space			
Enhanced	78%	63%	82%
Neither	13%	28%	10%
Detracted	9%	9%	8%
Volume of visitors in the exhibition			
Enhanced	64%	28%	49%
Neither	22%	26%	29%
Detracted	14%	46%	22%
Use of digital media			
Enhanced	73%	-	-
Neither	21%	-	-
Detracted	6%	-	-
[Base]	[164]	[791]	[897]

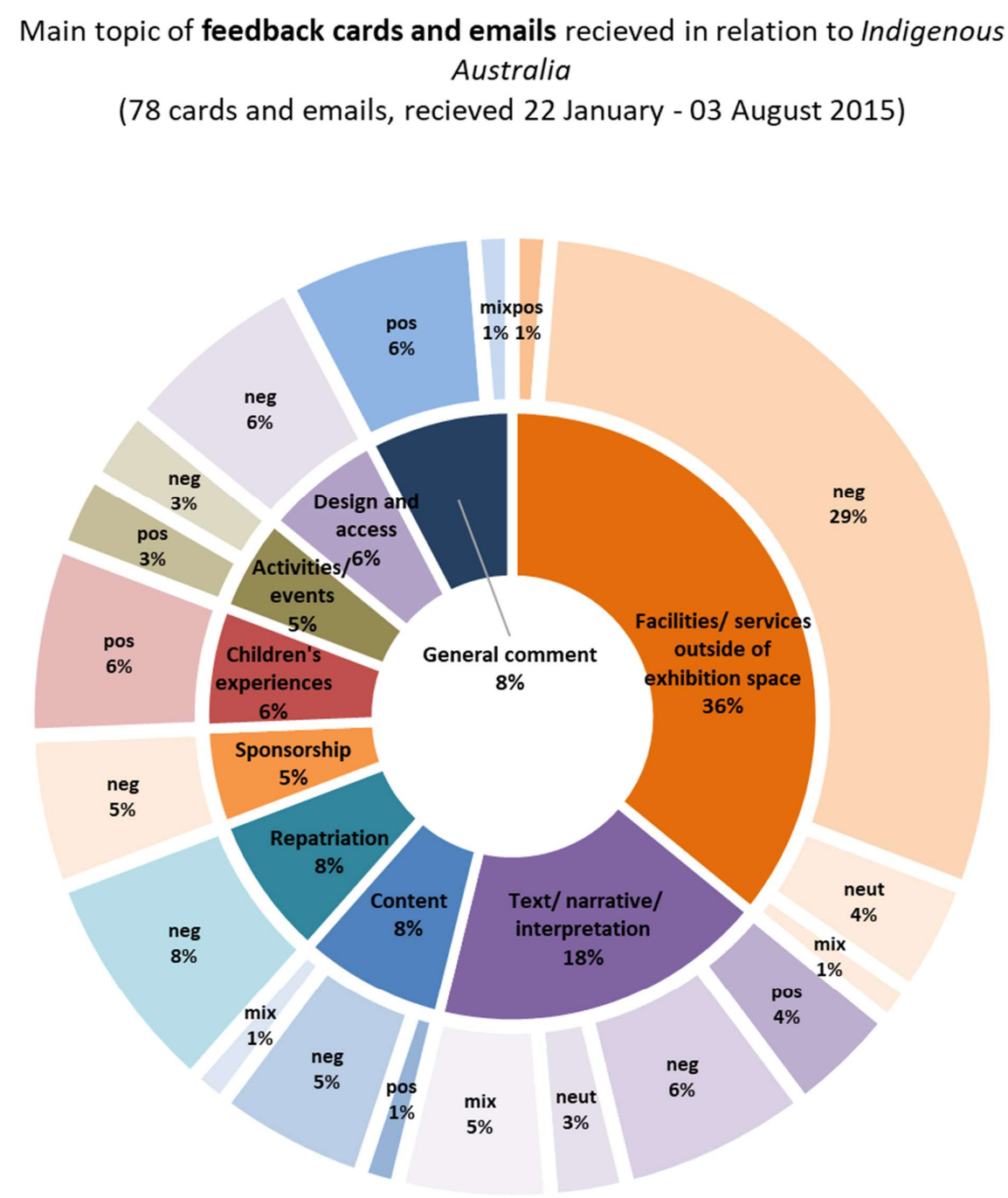
Ill. 12. Visitor satisfaction table from MHM report (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 21).

Visitor satisfaction comparator table	*Indigenous Australia: enduring civilisation*	*Germany: Memories of a Nation*	*Beyond el Dorado: power and gold in ancient Colombia*
Amount of information available			
Satisfied	81%	74%	81%
Neither	7%	18%	13%
Dissatisfied	12%	8%	7%
Tone of information and the language used			
Satisfied	82%	-	-
Neither	7%	-	-
Dissatisfied	11%	-	-
Themes / storyline / narrative of the exhibition			
Satisfied	78%	-	-
Neither	8%	-	-
Dissatisfied	14%	-	-
Film content			
Satisfied	81%	-	-
Neither	11%	-	-
Dissatisfied	7%	-	-
[Base]	[164]	[791]	[897]

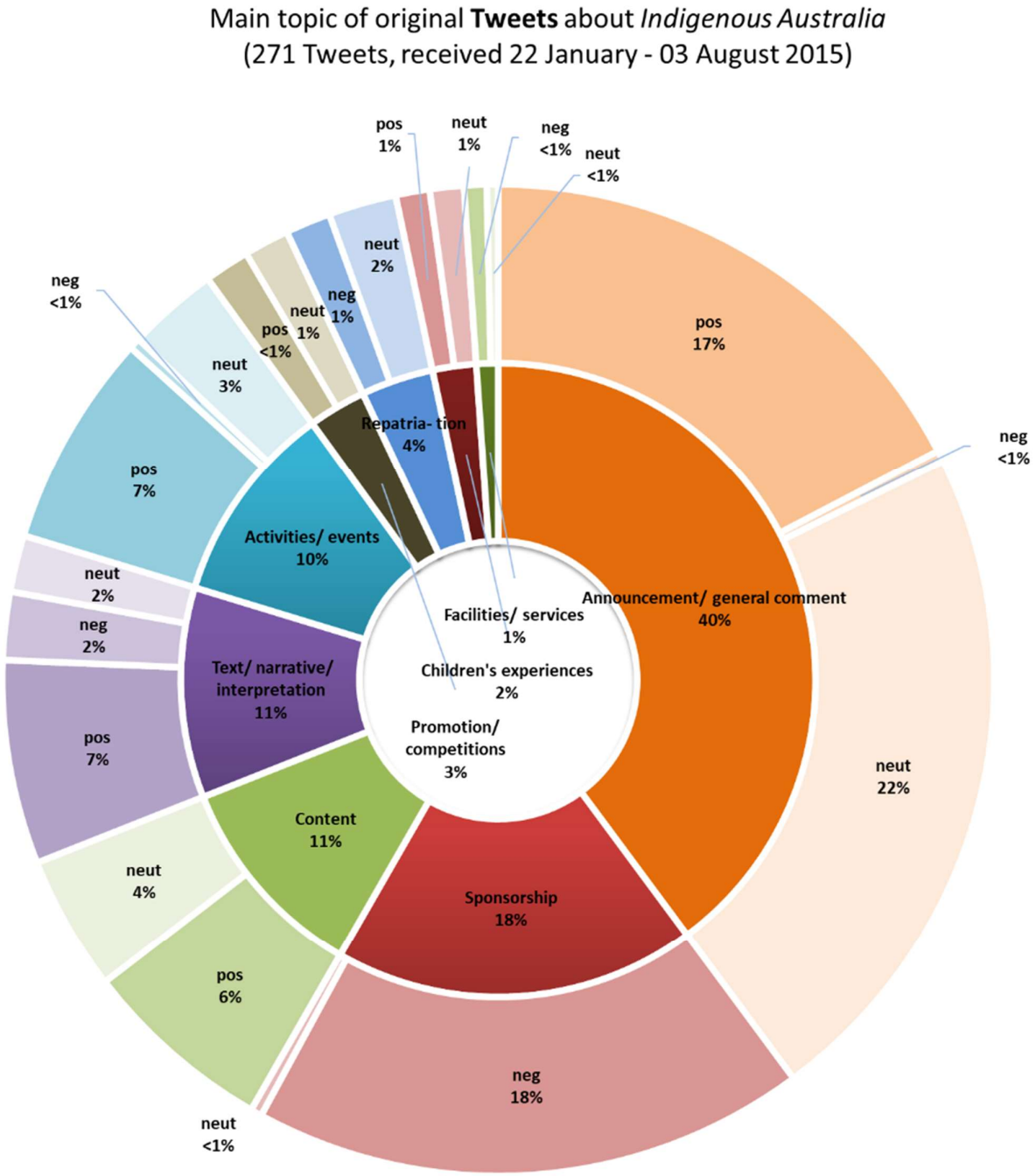
Ill. 13 Visitor satisfaction, table from MHM report (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2015: 22).

Twitter, and Feedback card and email: audience understanding

The analysis of the Twitter and feedback data provides a much greater insight into which particular aspects of *Indigenous Australia* audiences were engaged with, and why, than the MHM survey. This is partly because the analysis was developed to answer these questions, but is also a reflection of the nature of the data sets. The MHM survey only provides information on how favourably audiences viewed components of the exhibition which the BM were interested in. These areas were pre-chosen and in many of the questions participants were only able to grade their satisfaction level, not to provide their own comments on these areas. In contrast the Twitter and feedback data comprises visitors' unsolicited comments, providing information on which topics audiences chose to engage with, and how favourably they viewed these aspects of the exhibition. Ills. 13 and 14 provide a breakdown of the main topic areas for the comments in each data set. These charts also indicate a breakdown of the sentiment (positive, negative, neutral or mixed) of each of the topics.



Ill. 14 Author's chart



Ill. 15 Author's chart

Initial findings

Viewing the Twitter and Feedback charts alongside each other it becomes apparent that the users of both forms were commenting on a relatively small number of areas related to the exhibition. A second initial finding is that both sets of participants were interested in similar topics. These two data sets therefore, not only provide an insight into the opinions of two quite different sets of participants (one largely onsite and resident in the UK, the other largely online with a much more international profile), they also support each other, demonstrating the validity of analysing these forms of feedback and suggesting that the same subjects may have been important across a broader range of the BM's audience. Leaving aside references to promotions and competitions, which were only present on Twitter, comments from both sets of participants could be divided into eight categories: narrative and interpretation; content (mainly objects, but also film content); activities and events (such as lectures and performances); facilities and services (outside of the exhibition space); design and access (within the exhibition space); BP sponsorship of the exhibition; repatriation of objects; and children's experiences. Each of these topics is discussed in detail below.

General comments and announcements

Relatively few people comment on the exhibition in general as their main piece of feedback, but when they do it is usually to praise, or, in the case of Twitter to provide a neutral (albeit promotional) announcement that the exhibition is taking place, or that they are attending. The majority of general comments and announcements tend towards the positive. This suggests that if people have a negative response they are more able to articulate a specific reason for it. This provides a further indication of why there is a slightly higher proportion of negative responses in these samples.

Facilities and services

Facilities and services outside of the exhibition space formed 36% of comments from feedback and emails, and only 1% of Twitter comments, a result which reflects the different audiences represented in the data sets, as the majority of feedback cards and emails were composed by onsite visitors. The category of facilities and services encompasses participants who explained that they attended *Indigenous Australia*, but whose main comment was about other aspects of their visit, mainly toilet facilities, queues, security checks and physical access within the building. This, combined with the fact that these comments formed the largest single topic of onsite feedback, suggests that visitors' engagement with facilities and services outside of the

exhibition space had a higher impact on their overall experience than any component of the exhibition itself. A more detailed review of the content of these comments supports this. Many of the comments on facilities included no opinion on the exhibition itself (24% of all feedback), suggesting that a poor experience of toilet facilities, security checks or access, was the overriding memory of the day. The significant impact that facilities and services had on visitor experience provides little deep insight into visitors' encounters with the content, ideas and stories presented in *Indigenous Australia*. The finding does, however, have broader value, demonstrating the importance of considering exhibitions holistically. This could be useful when planning exhibitions, as it might be possible to mitigate negative experiences outside of the exhibition that could impact visitors' engagement with the display itself.

Children's experiences

Children and their carers had an overwhelmingly positive experience of *Indigenous Australia*, with every comment in this category constituting praise of the tactile family guide or another child friendly aspect of the display. These comments also represented a significant proportion of feedback, with 6% of cards and emails and 2% of tweets discussing children's experiences as the main comment. As children under 15 made up only 5% of visitors, this suggests that children's experiences are disproportionally important in relation to the overall visitor profile (the proportion of feedback cards and emails about children's experiences was actually slightly higher than the proportion of children who visited the exhibition).

Activities and events

Activities and events, including lectures, films and performances, were important to overall audience experience. Those who attended these events were largely positive (for example one person commented that they 'enjoyed the digeridoo performance' (feedback card), with negative responses taking the form of issues with access. The neutral comments took the form of queries or suggestions about events.

Design and access

Design and access within the exhibition space was an issue for some visitors. A few visitors complained that the exhibition was 'so dark' [feedback card] and that the space was difficult to move around in: 'The exhibition space felt small and poky and the awkward angles that the aisles were arranged in were difficult to navigate…' [email]. These comments support the

conclusion of the MHM survey that some visitors had trouble with physical issues inside the exhibition space.

A number of visitors commented about the noise made by the tactile family guide, which consisted of a group of wooden and plastic objects and tags arranged around a ring. As one visitor explained 'children [were] tempted to use them as rattles' [feedback card]. Another explained the impact that this had on their experience: 'I could neither hear the audio guide nor concentrate on reading the exhibition notes' (feedback card). As these guides were so popular with children and their carers it would be a shame to discount the possibility of using them in the future. Most of the comments indicated that they had been disturbed by large groups of school children using the guides. One possible solution would be to limit this type of guide to families and provide one guide for a small group of children to share in order to reduce the overall amount of noise produced.

Sponsorship

There was a strong reaction against BP sponsorship of *Indigenous Australia*. If the ninety-five feedback cards which were submitted as part of the protest are included then comments about sponsorship (all of them negative) make up 57% of feedback cards and emails. If these protest cards are disregarded, negative comments about sponsorship made up 5% of cards and emails. Negative comments about sponsorship make up 18% of tweets. It should be noted, however, that a significant proportion of tweets came from one account (user name Reclaim the Bard) which was set up specifically to protest BP sponsorship of the BM. This indicates that the wider body of visitors had less issues with sponsorship than figures from the Twitter sample suggests.

The content of the comments indicates that for those who did write in BP sponsorship was an important and highly emotive issue. One person wrote an email explaining, 'I have recently been given membership of the British Museum as a gift… I was dismayed to realise that the current exhibition about indigenous [sic] Australia is sponsored by BP.' All of these respondents expressed concerns about environmental damage caused by mining (including specific incidents and general concerns about climate change). Some respondents also commented on relationships between mining companies and indigenous peoples, arguing that mining has a disproportionate impact on indigenous groups. For example, one feedback card stated 'I would prefer it if BP paid retribution to the indigenous people whose home and lands it has destroyed'.

Repatriation

8% of feedback and 4% of tweets commented on the BM's holding of Indigenous Australian material as its main topic, a figure that does not include comments about sponsorship that also mentioned repatriation as a secondary issue. This is a small, but notable proportion of the overall feedback. Almost all of the cards and emails on this topic made statements requesting the BM repatriate items to Australia. These have been marked as negative because this opinion implies a criticism of the institution. The Twitter response was more varied. Four out of the ten Twitter comments on repatriation were negative, while six (marked neutral) raised the subject as a topic of debate. For example, one Twitter user asked 'Return or not - who should own indigenous #art?'. This questioning tone reflected the tone taken within the exhibition text itself, which presented different opinions on the issue (see *Chapter 4*). The tendency of the Twitter audience to raise debate rather than express opinion perhaps reflects the nature of Twitter as a medium for discussion. It also reflects the status of some of the accounts, which were officially or unofficially linked to individuals and institutions with a mandate to be impartial. One of the accounts, for example, was linked to the BBC.

As with comments on sponsorship, the tweets and feedback which expressed concern about the BM holding Indigenous Australian material were strongly worded:

> Somewhat uneasy about the contested status of exhibits @britishmuseum #IndigenousAustralia. First time I've felt that. [tweet]

> I have just visited the Australian Indigenous exhibition and was amazed and saddened to discover the range of very early and rare Indigenous material held in the BM collection. I look forward to the day when this important cultural material will be returned to the Aboriginal people of Australia. [Feedback card]

> I am opposed to paying an entry fee to view exhibits which have been acquired by the forces of colonialisation and retained immorally since.
> [Email]

As well as being forceful in their opinions these commenters also frequently used words which denoted emotion. For example, the sample above, includes the words ‘upsetting’, ‘felt’ ‘amazed’ and ‘saddened’. The comments also presented the situation as an ethical issue, using words such as ‘immoral’ and morally charged phrases, such as ‘I look forward to the day when…’. Overall, therefore, repatriation was not only an important issue for this proportion of the audience, it was also one which touched on audiences’ emotions and personal morality.

Content (objects)

Comments were classified in the topic of content if they discussed a particular object or group of objects on display in *Indigenous Australia* or if they described an object the author would have liked to have seen on display. This category also included tweets and feedback cards and emails which mentioned films. Comments on content made up 8% of comments cards/emails and 11% of tweets. The comments in this category marked negative all consist of requests for objects, or types of objects, that were not included, but that the author would have liked to have been on display. Often authors referred to objects they had seen at other museums. There was no clear consensus in these comments, with different authors having expected different types of objects. Some of the negative comments reflected on the amount of objects on display, again, with no consensus. Sometimes, the comments even contradicted each other. For example one feedback writer complained that ‘there was not enough on display here’, while another was ‘disappointed’ because there was too much, at least in certain categories, writing that there were 'too many baskets and too many spears'. The high degree of variation suggests that the proportion of comments indicating disappointment with content were largely expressions of personal preferences, rather than evidence of widespread opinion.

As a group the comments on content tended to contain words which denoted intellectual interest, and words which expressed emotions. This was particularly true of the tweets in this category which were overwhelmingly expressions of intellectual discovery and positive emotions. For example, one author provided an image of four different works (object refs. 1; 94; 7; 8), and wrote ‘Fascinating art at the @britishmuseum's #IndigenousAustralia exhibition: a rare glimpse into a very different world’. Another wrote: ‘Fascinated by the coral sculpture in #IndigenousAustralia exhibition at @britishmuseum’ (object ref. 92) Another tweet did not explicitly describe an emotion, but conveyed their sense of excitement at seeing a much anticipated object (object ref. 86):

> Finally got to see the #Dugong

@britishmuseum
She's in #IndigenousAustralia till Sunday

hiding'.[tweet, spacing reflects original]

The suggestion that the visitor had to seek out the 'hiding' dugong charm and the use of the gendered pronoun, convey a tone of fun or excitement. Tweets such as these which expressed a sense of emotional engagement appeared most consistently in this category (and only featured frequently in three other topic groups, repatriation, sponsorship and text/ narrative/ interpretation). This suggests that the objects in *Indigenous Australia* were well received and had a significant impact on overall experience. More broadly the high level of emotion in these comments on objects combined with the relatively high proportion of these comments, suggests that despite increasing emphasis on digital media in museums, objects remain one of the most important factors in visitor experience. This is particularly striking in regard to the Twitter feedback, as it might be expected that this segment of the audience, who were clearly engaged with digital technology and social media, would be more interested in film and digital content than other audience groups.

This group of tweets also provide an insight into the ways in which Indigenous Australian objects may have had agency within the exhibition space. Drawing on Gell, Maruška Svašek writes that objects have agency through their ability to facilitate emotion. Invocation of emotion is not only a form of agency in itself, but it can in turn influence social experiences and decisions; objects have the 'power to evoke emotions and cause social action' (Svašek 2008: 232). The tweet about the Dugong charm demonstrates this concept in action in *Indigenous Australia*. The charm and its perceived, rather playful, personality, caused an emotional reaction in the author (interest and excitement), which in turn caused them to engage in the social actions of looking for the charm and of sharing this experience on Twitter. Furthermore, the tweet implies that the charm may have even been the impetus for the author's decision to visit *Indigenous Australia* as the author describes their prior anticipation to see the charm.[39] Not all of the object tweets demonstrate the same level of engagement, but many convey emotional responses to objects, providing evidence of objects within the exhibition being 'imagined and experienced as emotional agents' (Svašek 2008: 230). This ability to excite and

[39] It is likely that the author of the tweet first encountered the Dugong charm when it featured as the BMs mystery object on Twitter (#mysteryobject).

influence the viewer again emphases the importance of objects for visitor experience of *Indigenous Australia*.

This also raises the question of whether the emotional connections with the objects may have facilitated or deepened visitors' engagement with other aspects of the exhibition, such as the stories and information it presented. This hypothesis is supported by visitor comments which explicitly link objects to their broader learning experiences within the display. Visitor engagement in museums can highlight the ways in which objects can facilitate new and deeper learning experiences for both children and adults compared with learning in, for example, a classroom environment (Rowe 2002). One of the ways this takes place is through dialogues between visitors about objects (Coffee 2013; Rowe 2002: 22). Discussions about objects can help visitors understand information, seek their own meanings, and retain information and ideas (Rowe 2002). The tweets about objects suggest that these learning experiences were taking place in *Indigenous Australia*, particularly as some authors explicitly linked objects to information and concepts they had learned about in the exhibition. For example one user wrote: 'Learning about #IndigenousAustralia at the @britishmuseum - these beautiful art works tell stories of the #Dreamtime [link to image of the two Spinifex paintings]' (object refs. 1; 162). Other learning experiences are apparent in descriptions of favourite or 'highlight' objects, demonstrating visitors' desire to remember and share information about objects. '#IndigenousAustralia: Uta Uta Tjangala's masterpiece *Yumari* is a highlight @britishmuseum #art' wrote one author, accompanying the description with an image of the painting (object ref. 94). Another chose the jawun by Abe Muriata as a 'highlight' (object ref. 176). The tweet about the Dugong revealed an even deeper learning experience as it not only illustrates the author's engagement with the object inside the exhibition space, but also demonstrates that they did their own external research. This is evident when the author mentions the (presumed) gender of the dugong as this was not described in the exhibition text, nor were the depicted genitals visible at the angle that the charm was displayed. It is highly likely that the visitor searched for the object on the BM's online collections database as this is one of the few sources (and the most public source) where this information is available. Tweets about content suggest, therefore, that the objects on display aided visitors' learning experiences, by providing the opportunity to share and discuss stories and information, to retain the information they had learned and even to do further research of their own. These tweets which demonstrate learning through dialogues about objects not only provide us with an insight into visitors' experience in Indigenous Australia they also provide broader insights about the role of social media within museums, suggesting

that virtual dialogues on such platforms can facilitate learning in situations where in-person social interaction is not possible.

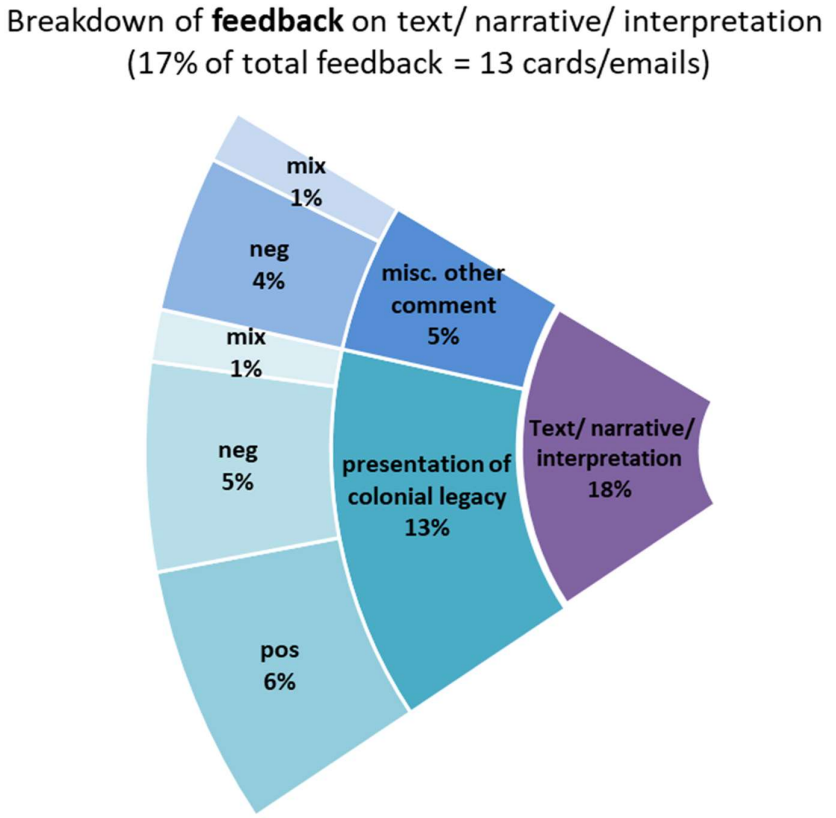
Text/ Narrative/ interpretation

There were thirty-five comments of which the main topic was text/ narrative or interpretation within *Indigenous Australia*. These represented 11% of all tweets and 18% of all feedback. These comments either referred to words or information in the text, or to particular stories and narrative approach. They indicate that a significant proportion of the audience was engaging closely with the text and narrative of *Indigenous Australia*. A small proportion of these comments are described as miscellaneous. These are generally one-off comments asking questions about particular aspects of text/ narrative or information (such as details about the source of a photograph), or drawing attention to a variety of errors, or perceived errors, with spelling, dates and other information provided in the text. The rest of the comments in this category shared a striking commonality – all focused on aspects of the way *Indigenous Australia* represented the colonial legacy. This common theme led me to consider these comments as a separate sub-category (ills. 15 & 16). Comments were assigned to this subcategory if they explicitly mentioned the way colonial history and its ongoing consequences were presented in the display. These explicit comments made up the majority of this category, but a few comments were also placed in this category because they contained clear evidence of colonialist discourses, even if the author was not conscious of this.[40] An example of this is a feedback card in which the author wrote:

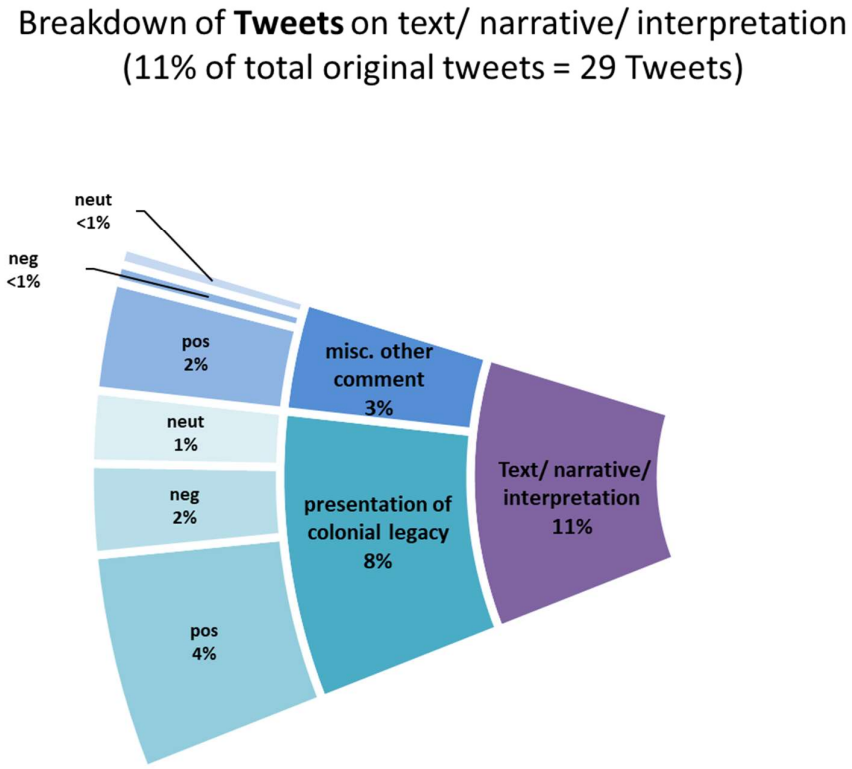
> I was dismayed to see that the forthcoming exhibition on Australian Aboriginal Art described as emanating from a "civilisation" which it does not. The Aborigines have a highly developed culture but have not been used to a settled city state. Shame on you the British Museum is here to EDUCATE. [feedback card]

While the author presented their comment as a factual one, I classed it as a comment on the 'presentation of the colonial legacy' as the contemporary semantics of the words 'civilised' and 'uncivilised' are deeply embedded in 18th and 19th century discourses on race, discourses which were often used to justify colonial ambitions.

[40] This designation makes 'presentation of colonial legacy' the only category which may classify comments in ways in which it possible the author of the comment would not agree with.


Breakdown of **feedback** on text/ narrative/ interpretation
(17% of total feedback = 13 cards/emails)
mix
1%
neg
4%
misc. other
comment
5%
mix
1%
neg
5%
presentation of
colonial legacy
13%
Text/ narrative/
interpretation
18%
pos
6%

Ill. 16



Ill. 17

The first thing of note about this subcategory is that it represented a perceptible proportion of all comments. 8% of tweets and 13% of feedback cards and emails were specifically on the presentation of the colonial legacy in the display (ills. 15 & 16). The amount of comments suggests that audiences considered colonial histories and their consequences to be important topics within *Indigenous Australia*. There was a wide range of opinions on the topic, with over half expressing positive opinions on the way these stories and themes had been presented. Many praised the decision to discuss difficult histories with directness and clarity:

> …good that you did not shy away from tackling the elephant in the room: the treatment of the Indigenous population by their oppressors. 10/10 [feedback card]

> #Indigenousaustralia exhibition @britishmuseum - very interesting with #colonial #Australia issues too
> do go before it closes on 02 August [tweet]

> #IndigenousAustralia exhibition @britishmuseum is powerful and moving. Importantly, it doesn't gloss over the evils of colonialism. See it. [tweet]
>
> The @britishmuseum's #IndigenousAustralia exhibition gives great insight into the struggles Aboriginals deal with still today. #fascinating [tweet]
>
> Now *there's* a double meaning. Clever, @britishmuseum... #IndigenousAustralia pic.twitter.com/zfDleneVL1 [tweet referring to the exhibition title]

As well as praising the BM for raising difficult issues, some authors explained the impact it had had on them:

> We were challenged to consider the ethics of 'collecting artefacts' at the @britishmuseum #indigenousAustralia exhibition, eyes opened. [tweet]

Another author raised a question themselves, reflecting the interpretative aim to bring issues and debates to light through the exhibition.

> Have you seen the @BritishMuseum's #IndigenousAustralia show? What's the best way for museums to engage w/ cultures/fmr colonies on exhibit? [tweet, without abbreviations the second sentence reads ‘What’s the best way for museums to engage with cultures from former colonies on exhibit.’ [tweet]

While some audience members considered the debate on how to represent colonial history to be valuable in itself, others actively engaged in it, by questioning the way Indigenous Australian peoples and their histories had been represented in the exhibition. Some of these comments mentioned terminology used in the text:

> Inconsistency in use of Aboriginal Peoples not Aboriginal people. I've lived + worked in northern Australia + worked with Aboriginal communities. They are peoples not people. [Feedback card]
>
> “@britishmuseum: #IndigenousAustralia exhibition pic.twitter.com/J4RDMMuwOo” @cathellis13 'indigenous' is a word I don't like. [tweet]

> Is "unsuccessfully" the most politically charged word in @britishmuseum's #IndigenousAustralia exhibition? pic.twitter.com/8i5haIbg99 [tweet with image of text panel][41]
>
> The @britishmuseum couldn't bring itself to say "stole", so settled for "took without consent" #IndigenousAustralia pic.twitter.com/bfQOSeOIrj [tweet with image of text panel]
>
> The @britishmuseum also referred to Cook's declaration of terra nullius as a "misunderstanding" #IndigenousAustralia #languagematters [tweet]
>
> Went to the British Museum exhibition on Indigenous Australians yday. It described colonisation as a misunderstanding. [tweet, with image of text panel]

These comments demonstrate a high level of engagement with the text and a sophisticated understanding of the issues and responsibilities embedded in representing and discussing Britain and Australia's shared colonial past.

A deeper analysis of visitor comments indicates that one reason why some audience members were dissatisfied with the way colonial histories were represented in *Indigenous Australia* was that they disagreed with the use of particular words. One tweet raising concern at the use of the word 'misunderstanding' in a text panel received over 600 retweets (as well as over 200 likes and a number of replies), making it more popular than any tweets on the exhibition from the BM's own account (the most successful BM tweet on *Indigenous Australia* received 193 retweets, see ill. 5). The full text of the panel in question read:

> **Encounters in Country**
> The histories of Indigenous Australia and Britain have been interlinked since Captain Cook stepped ashore on the lands of the Gwaegal people (Botany Bay) in 1770. He sailed up the east coast to Bedanug in the Torres Strait and renamed it Possession

[41] This was a reference to the caption for one of the wall quotes about repatriation. The text read: '"There will be no spiritual peace until the dead are returned to country." Delegation of Torres Strait Islanders to the British Museum, unsuccessfully seeking the return of ancestral remains, 2012'

> Island. The British Admiralty instructed Cook to claim any uninhabited territory. Failing to understand how Indigenous people possessed, used and cared for the land, Cook claimed it for King George III as if it was a land belonging to no one. This initial misunderstanding has since shaped Australian land law and history.

This original tweet on the panel, and the number of responses to this, prompted the BM to reply on Twitter and in a blog post. The reply was sent directly to the Twitter account which first raised the issue. The full dialogue, beginning with this original tweet, went as follows:

Visitor:

> The @britishmuseum also referred to Cook's declaration of terra nullius as a "misunderstanding" #IndigenousAustralia #languagematters

BM:

> The devastating impact of colonisation is too important to address in a single panel (or tweet) 1/3
>
> The ‘misunderstanding’ in this panel refers to how the British interpreted Aboriginal use and ownership of the land 2/3
>
> You can read more about these issues, and how they are fully explored throughout the exhibition here [link to blog post] 3/3

The blog post that the BM linked to expanded on the Twitter reply in two ways. Firstly it explained the use of the word ‘misunderstanding’, in terms of British understandings of Aboriginal use of the land:

> The colony that became Australia was founded on the mistaken notion of terra nullius, that there were not pre-existing societies with pre-existing rights and laws that governed them and the lands they inhabited.

Secondly the blog post addressed the concern that the text diminished colonial acts, by using clear language to describe this history, for example one section explained:

> The essential truth is that Aboriginal people were dispossessed from their land by force, their populations reduced by disease and violence, and their cultural beliefs and practices disrespected and sometimes destroyed.

While the visitor who sent the original tweet appreciated the nuance of this reply, they argued that this did not diminish the problems inherent in the original text, explaining:

> Thank you for your reply. I understand what the panel is referring to. It implies the colonisation of Australia was based on 1/5
>
> A misunderstanding about land ownership, rather than a deliberate and violent dispossession of a whole people for gain 2/5
>
> The euphemisms in the text minimise what happened and 'misunderstanding' reads as an attempt to excuse the colonisers 3/5
>
> I included the whole panel so that people could make up their own minds and a lot of people seem to agree 4/5
>
> Thanks for linking to your blog. If only the panel, which many more people will see, had represented such views 5/5

The debate over the use of the word 'mistaken' in this text panel speaks for itself. Both the BM and the visitor present their opinions with clarity and the points it raises about the use of language in museums have value in themselves. In addition the dialogue, and its popularity with other users, demonstrates three deeper insights into the audience response to *Indigenous Australia*. The first is that a significant number of the BM's online audience cared about Britain and Australia's colonial legacy and how it was represented (there were over 600 Twitter responses to this one discussion). The second insight is that a segment of the audience paid very close attention to the use of language in *Indigenous Australia*, particularly when discussing imperialism and its ongoing consequences. This demonstrates the audience's awareness of the way language has been used to legitimise imperial activities in the past. The third insight that this dialogue provides is that these audience members were motivated to engage in deeper and more sophisticated debate with the BM about its representation of Indigenous Australian peoples and their histories. It is worth noting that other Twitter users who responded to this debate had a range of views, both agreeing and disagreeing with the original visitor's

interpretation. As with the original dialogue these debates were thoughtful and respectful. This is a valuable insight for future exhibitions of colonial era material as it suggests that it would be possible and beneficial to provide opportunities for visitors to engage in these debates within the exhibition space itself. This would not only ensure that comments and concerns were visible to all visitors, it would also incorporate wider audience voices into the wider dialogues about these issues, which are usually limited to the sphere of museum professionals, Indigenous communities, and academics.

Leaving aside the specific points raised, this group of comments (both positive and negative) is valuable as evidence of audience interest in how museums should remember and represent Britain's colonial past and its ongoing consequences. Audiences were not only interested, but were also keen to participate in dialogues about this question. In this respect these comments demonstrate that *Indigenous Australia* fulfilled one of the original aims of those involved in its production, which was to encourage the BM's wider public to engage in a more nuanced and detailed debate around the institution and its Indigenous Australian collection, in light of its colonial origins (these aims are discussed in *Chapter 3*). It is, perhaps, unsurprising that not all visitors raised positive points, and that a few raised points which are unsettling or problematic (such as the comment about the use of the term civilisation). As this is such an emotive and complex issue, it is inevitable that misconceptions and prejudices will be aired and differences of opinion will arise. The dialogue about the use of the word 'mistaken' demonstrates, however, that audiences and museums can engage in productive conversations. This could be a valuable finding for future exhibitions. At a time when museums are aiming to discuss and reflect on their own colonial legacies, perhaps there should be more spaces for these dialogues to take place within exhibition spaces. This would provide audiences with a greater understanding of debates which are already taking place among museum professionals and Indigenous communities, and would also incorporate audience voices into the dialogue.

Conclusion: the moral audience

The audience response to *Indigenous Australia* was overwhelmingly positive. This was particularly the case for those who visited the exhibition onsite with 85% of general visitors having a good experience. There is no definitive answer for why this was the case, but the analysis suggest that audiences were particularly intellectually and emotionally engaged in

three areas represented in the exhibition space itself. The first was the objects, the second the narrative, text and interpretation, particularly themes related to colonial history, the third was the BM's role in holding colonial era collections. While some audience members expressed deeply felt concerns about these areas in unsolicited feedback, the MHM survey indicates that the majority of visitors were positive about the choices that were made regarding objects and narrative, including the way that repatriation was addressed in the display. Given the importance of these aspects of the exhibition to visitors, it is likely that they were major contributing factors to overall positive experiences. Visitors who provided positive feedback on these areas commented, in particular, on the beauty and interest value of the objects and the presentation of difficult histories in a balanced narrative.

The three data sets addressed above also provide deeper insight into audience understandings and experiences of *Indigenous Australia*. These can be related to the aims of the people who made the exhibition. As discussed in Chapter 3 an underlying aim was that *Indigenous Australia* would challenge colonial legacies by telling difficult histories, engaging Indigenous communities and reflecting on the BM's role in Britain's colonial past and present. The in-depth analysis of unsolicited comments through Twitter and feedback cards and emails reveals that a significant proportion of the BM's audience was also deeply invested in these topics. 8% of all Twitter comments and 13% of all feedback cards and emails commented specifically on the representation of the colonial legacy in the text and narrative. A further 4% of Twitter feedback and 8% of cards and emails were specifically about the subject of the BM's holding of colonial era material from Australia. Furthermore, a number of comments on the exhibitions' sponsorship arrangement related this, in some form, to issues of indigenous peoples' rights in Australia and globally. The comments on colonial legacy were particularly polarized, with some visitors interrogating the phrasing of some parts of the text and others praising the interpretation for explicitly describing difficult histories and taking a balanced approach to the debates raised by this history. This reveals a portion of the BM's audience that is deeply engaged in ideological issues around Britain's colonial past and how it should be addressed today, and supports the curatorial approach of addressing and discussing these topics in *Indigenous Australia*.

6. Conclusion:
Making history with sites of memory

> Allow [these collections] to ignite your imaginations and find within them universal lessons and sentiments of how we can live more vibrant, inclusive and humane lives. Then one day, when we have learnt from our mixed heritage and accepted our equal Indigenous and non-Indigenous nation-hoods, we will be ready for these objects to be returned home.
>
> June Oscar speaking at a lecture at Kings College, University of London before the opening of *Indigenous Australia* (Oscar 2015).

> Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again.
>
> Pierre Nora, *Between Memory and History* (Nora 1989: 9).

This thesis began by asking: what are the uses and meanings of Indigenous Australian collections in the UK today? The analysis that followed rested on the premise that this question could be answered through interrogating participants' aims and understandings of the *Indigenous Australia* exhibition at the British Museum. As each chapter progressed, different perspectives become apparent. *Chapter 2* considered changing attitudes in the BM towards its Indigenous Australian collections and towards its role as a major cultural institution in British society. I argue that the BM has moved towards promoting and understanding the historic contexts of its collections; a mandate which includes discussing and displaying the difficult histories of colonisation. *Chapter 3* charted the aims and experiences of the people who produced *Indigenous Australia*. It revealed a complex range of encounters and events that embraced the multiple opinions and aims of the different participants (including exhibitors and Indigenous and non-Indigenous community consultants). Together these activities formed a central shared aim of 'challenging colonial legacies'. *Chapter 4* considered the finished exhibition, tracing how the aims of the producers translated into a display which encompassed the complexities and contradictions of the diverse opinions and understandings of Indigenous Australian material. The finished exhibition contained multiple narratives and addressed difficult questions such as requests for repatriation of objects to traditional owners. *Chapter 5* analysed audiences' responses to *Indigenous Australia,* revealing that the audiences in London

and online were also deeply interested in questions about the colonial legacy. They too were concerned with issues arising from the holding of Indigenous Australian objects in UK collections, particularly repatriation requests and the ways that difficult colonial histories were displayed and discussed. Audience comments also indicated a desire to be involved in the wider debate about these collections and their roles. This chapter gave a crucial insight into the experiences and understandings of a group who have, largely, been left out of the debate on this material, and suggests that museums need to do more to facilitate audiences' inclusion in these discussions.

Viewed as a whole, this four-part analysis not only illuminates a range of opinions on the role of colonial era collections today, it also provides a much needed summary of what this debate is actually about. The compelling, but slightly vague call to challenge colonial legacies becomes a more concrete set of three broad aims: displaying difficult histories; facilitating the meaningful involvement of traditional owners in decisions over how the collection is managed and displayed; and having honest reflections and dialogues on the BM's ongoing role in holding this material. While there were differences of opinion, about what the outcome of these processes should be, there was consensus that these were the central issues at play. The phrase 'challenging colonial legacies' also furnishes an insight into a much more ambitious aim – that these collections could have wider impacts on the relationship between Indigenous Australia and Britain. Furthermore, lying behind this aim is the hope that these relationships would, in turn, have benefits for both Indigenous Australian and British communities. This is the sentiment that Oscar expresses so eloquently in the quote above. This concept is one reason why I have titled this conclusion 'Making history with sites of memory.' Oscar communicates a distinct conviction that Indigenous Australian collections' 'sites of memory' of the colonial past, could have significant impacts on future relationships and could therefore 'make history'.

Oscar's statement also encapsulates another message, which is important in the light of the idea that museums could have wider impacts on British and Australian society. Referencing the debate over whether Indigenous Australian materials should be returned to their traditional owners, Oscar suggests that the benefit of them remaining in London is that they can act as ambassadors, teaching audiences about the shared histories of Indigenous Australian and British communities and compelling people to learn from the dark aspects of this past. As she said they can teach 'universal lessons and sentiments of how we can live more vibrant, inclusive and humane lives' (Oscar 2015). Crucially, however, the collections and museums themselves

are not the true forces of change; they only provide 'lessons and sentiments' for people to draw on (Oscar 2015). Oscar's unspoken point is that the lessons that museum collections can provide, need to be taken up in other spheres in society.

This touches on a question which arose many times while I was working on *Indigenous Australia* and while I was writing this thesis. Have questions about full restitution for Britain's colonial past, which can only be answered through wider political debate, become displaced onto museums? This is not to say that the people involved in *Indigenous Australia* were directly aiming to 'challenge colonial legacies' in society more broadly, but that the museum became a site of emotion and debate which embodied much larger aims than could be solved by any amount of museum activities. These were the aims which were articulated by Oscar in the statement at the beginning of this chapter, particularly embracing the fact that Indigenous Australia and Britain share a history and should come together to ensure that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can 'live more vibrant, inclusive and humane lives' (Oscar 2015). Furthermore, some of the issues which *are* explicitly relevant to museums with colonial era collections are also best answered politically. This is particularly true in relation to requests for the repatriation of objects in national museums. The BM's response to claims for repatriation, is at one level an undeniably political question, as it is dictated by an Act of Parliament. Currently this Act prevents the deaccession of objects (excepting human remains) ("British Museum Act" 1963).

These broader issues do not lie within the scope of this thesis but the question, of why museums may have taken on these debates, does. There are two interlinked reasons. The first is that the museum is a rare example of a public institution in the UK, which is engaging in dialogues and collaborations with Indigenous Australian communities. Museums simply, therefore, provide a place where discussions of colonial legacies can take place. The second is that colonial era collections are, to follow Pierre Nora's conception, sites of memory (Nora 1989: 7). These sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*) have become important, and indeed only exist because the environments of memory (*milieux de mémoire*) have gone (Nora 1989: 7). In other words, the cultural memory of particular events, such as colonial histories, has become embedded in things (such as places and objects) because the lived social memory of this history has passed. Nora's concept affords an insight into why the repatriation debate has become such a prominent and emotive issue for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It suggests that the cultural memories of Indigenous Australia and Britain's shared history (as well as many other

Indigenous Australian memories) have become embedded in these objects and so these objects have taken on a great value.[42] This, in turn, raises the possibility that wider questions arising from these legacies, such as whether British and Australian governments should be engaging in more meaningful and productive relationships with Indigenous Australian peoples, have become displaced onto the repatriation debate.

That is not to say, however, that museums should not play a role in wider debates. Their status as sites of memory could in fact be useful. In a work that considers objects of memory in different cultural contexts, Mack writes that 'it is arguable that shared memory is a defining characteristic of cultures and societies' (Mack 2003: 12). Memory itself is therefore not only something that different groups of people share (and can relate to), but it is also something that connects people – shared memory indicates a form of cultural connection. This suggests that displaying and discussing memories of Britain and Australia's shared history museums could facilitate closer connections between communities in these countries.

I began this thesis by establishing the ideological role of museums in society, in order to understand why it is important for museums to consider the meanings and functions of their colonial era collections. I conclude it by recognising the limitations of this role. Museums *are* actors in society, but they are not the major players. Broader social and political changes happen through other spheres. *Indigenous Australia* demonstrates, however, that contemporary museums can display difficult colonial histories, the issues that arise from these histories, and the multiple complex narratives and opinions within them. These museum collections can also illuminate and facilitate debates among UK audiences and have specific impacts on individuals and communities at a local level (as Muriata so eloquently describes in reference to the political and financial benefits of his community arts work in *Chapter 4*). Furthermore, museums are establishing ways to enable traditional owners to have more sustained and meaningful connections with objects and to have direct involvement in the care and use of these collections. These are uses and functions of colonial era collections in Britain today.

[42] Hooper has termed objects such as this, which take on emotional and spiritual relevance as a result of their relationship to particular people or events, 'contact relics' (Hooper 2014: 193-195).

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Appendix 1. List of key exhibitions related to Indigenous Australia, 1947- present

Date	Museum	Exhibition title
1947	**Australia House, The Strand**	Australian Aboriginal cave paintings
1948	**Australia House, The Strand**	?
1949	**British Museum/travelling**	
1950, opened 28 July.	**Hall of India and Pakistan, Overseas League, London**	?
1951	**Foyle's Gallery. Charing Cross Road, London**	
1952	**The Wellcome Historical Medical Museum**	an Exhibition Illustrating the Medicine of the Aboriginal Peoples in the British Commonwealth
28 Aug – 14 Sep 1957	**Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA)**	Aboriginal Art of Australia: Paintings on Bark collected in Arnhem Land, Northern Australia by Charles Mountford OBE
30 November-14 December 1957	**The Arts Council Gallery, 11 Rothesay Terrace, Edinburgh**	Bark Paintings: aboriginal Art of Australia

1958	**Australia House, The Strand**	The second Sir Thomas White Lecture, given at Australia House before the Society of Australian Writers, 14 April 1958.
1965	**Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool**	Australian Aboriginal Bark Paintings : 1912-1964
1965	**Royal Academy, London**	Treasures of the Commonwealth
1966	**? Nottingham**	Art of the Commonwealth Festival
1972 23 June -1982 27 February	**British Museum: Department of Ethnography, Room 10 Burlington Gardens**	The Aboriginies of Australia
1978 22 Nov - ?	**Institute of Contemporary Arts**	1978 22 Nov - ? Exhibition of Colour Photographs of Experimental Body Jewellery from Western Australia
1981	**Leicestershire Museums**	Tribal Encounters: An exhibition of ethnic objects collected by David Attenborough
1982, 13 Mar – 25 Apr	**Institute of Contemporary Arts & The Serpentine**	! Eureka ! Artists from Australia
1982	**Museum of Mankind (British Museum: Department of Ethnography, Room 10 Burlington Gardens)**	Australian Art of the Western Desert

20 September – 10 October 1982	**Commonwealth Institute**	Australian Film and Theatre: A book exhibition
1986	**Museum of Mankind (British Museum: Department of Ethnography, Room 10 Burlington Gardens)**	Lost Magic Kingdoms
14 January -13 March 1987	**Institute of Contemporary Arts**	State of the Art: Ideas and Images in the 1980's
1987 9 May to 14 June	**Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth**	1987 Art and Aboriginality,
1988 (March)-1989 (April)	**Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford**	Australia in Oxford
1988 February	**Ulster Museum, Belfast**	Travelling at Port Phillip : the Australian aborigines at the time of European contact : an Ulster Museum exhibition for the Australian Bicentennial, February 1988
1988 7 Apr – 29 May	**Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA)**	Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri: Paintings 1973-1986
1988 7 Apr – 29 May	**Institute of Contemporary Arts**	Imants Tillers: Works 1978-88
1988	**The Royal Pavillion, Art Gallery & Museums, Brighton**	Yolngu: Aboriginal Cultures of North Australia

1988 7 Apr – 22 May	**Institute of Contemporary Arts**	Elsewhere: Photo-Based Work From Australia
March-May 1988	**Commonwealth Institute, London. The Usher Art Gallery, Lincoln**	Stories of Australian Art
Apr-88	**Institute of Contemporary Arts**	Visualizing Australia
29 June - 3 September 1988	**Fisher Fine Art, London**	Australian Bicentennial Exhibition
1988 July- 1989, May	**Museum of Mankind (British Museum: Department of Ethnography, Room 10 Burlington Gardens)**	Dreams and the Land: contemporary Australian Aboriginal Paintings
01 August-10 September 1988	**Dumfries Museum**	Thomas Watling-Dumfries Convict Artist
1989	**Drew Gallery, Canterbury. Part of the 1989 Cantebury Festival. Toured to Chisenhale gallery, London**	In Transit: Australian Sculpture/Video/Perforamce
1989	**Commonwealth Institute, London**	Mantrika
7 June -13 August 1989	**Victoria & Albert Museum**	Australian Fashion: The Contemporary Art: An Exhibition

1990	**Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, ?also travelled to Swansea and Manchester**	Tagari Lia: My Family (Festival of Contemporary Aboriginal Arts, in 1990)
7 August - 4 September 1991	**Barbican (Barbican Concourse)**	Songlines
2 May - 13 June 1992	**Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow**	Tracey Moffatt.
18 June008August 1993	**The South Bank Centre**	Boomerang: Sights and Sounds of the First Australians
16 July -17 October 1993.	**St Mungos Museum of Religious Life and Art, Glasgow**	Painting the World. Aboriginal Painitng Law
1994	**Hayward Gallery**	Aratjara: Art of the First Australians
1994	**Touring exhibition: Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool, South London Gallery and City Gallery, Leicester**	True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Raise the Flag
1995 (jan?)	**Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh**	Donald Kahn's collection of Aboriginal Art.- title unknown
April 1996 - ?	**Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art**	Reopening
1996 23 October – 7 December	**October Gallery**	Aboriginal Artists

1997 3 September- 4 October	**October Gallery**	Keepers of the Mimi Spirit – Aboriginal Art from Arnhem Land
1997	**Museum of Modern Art, Oxford**	In Place, out of time: Contemporary Art in Australia
4 July - 23 August 1998	**Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol**	Tracey Moffatt
1998 9 September- 7 November	**October Gallery**	Australian Aboriginal Art from Arnhem Land and Melville Island
26 May - 19 June 1999	**Victoria Miro Gallery**	Tracey Moffatt: Laudanum
1999-2000	**ICON Gallery, Birmingham; Arnolfini, Bristol, UK**	History and Memory in the Art of Gordon Bennett
1999	**Various**	TRACE – Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art
2000	**Gimpel Fils, London, UK**	Mommy Dearest
2000	**Empire and Commonwealth Museum, Bristol (now closed)**	?
11 February-25 March 2000	**The Photography Gallery, London**	The Citibank Private Bank Photography Prize 2000 in association with The Photographers' Gallery London

24 June to 25 November 2000	**Commonwealth Institute**	Australian Dreaming
24 January – 24 February 2001	**October Gallery**	News from the Front: The Transvangarde in 2001
2001	**City Arts Centre, Edinburgh**	Australia Dreaming: Contemporary Aboriginal Art
2002	**Museum of Modern Art, Oxford**	Trauma
23 April - 22 June 2002	**The British Empire and the Commonwealth Museum, Bristol**	The Earth for Us - Aboriginal Art from Australia's First People
5 February – 15 March 2003	**October Gallery**	From Panama to Outback
22nd Apr - 24th May 2003	**University of Brighton Gallery**	Dream Traces: A celebration of Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Art
8 September 2004 to 23 October 2004	**October Gallery**	'nother side
5 November 2004 – 29 January 2005	**October Gallery**	Intelligence Now!
December 8 2005- January 28 2006	**October Gallery**	Memory as Landscape

06 April – 06 May 2006	**October Gallery**	Lockhart River Art Gang
02 Jul 2005 – 29 Aug 2005	**SCVA**	Out There
19 October – 25 November 2006	**October Gallery**	Strange Fruit
2007	**Open Unviersity, Walton Hall Campus, Milton Keynes**	Art Walk 2007
2007	**MAA, Cambridge**	The Expiation of Guilt
2008	**October Gallery**	Samantha Hobson: Our life…is land…is culture
25 November 2008-7 April 2010	**Tate Modern (Touring exhibition through UK and Australia)**	Figuring Landscapes: Artists Moving Image from Australia and the UK
24 May-5 June 2010	**The Gallery in Cork Street, London (hired by Jennifer Guerrini-Maraldi Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Art)**	Sally Gabori - Mundamurra ngijinda dulk: My Island Home
26 May – 11 September 2011	**British museum**	Out of Australia: prints and drawings from Sidney Nolan to Rover Thomas

2011	**British Museum**	Baskets and Belonging
26-Nov-11	**Modern Art Oxford**	SOLO
26 June 2012 – 03 January 2013	**Pitt Rivers Museum**	We Bury Our Own
01 November – 01 December 2012	**October Gallery**	Broken Dreams
21 September - 08 December 2013	**Royal Academy**	Australia
6th – 11th November	**The Hospital Club**	We Bury Our Own
27 November - 29 November 2013	**South Bank Centere**	The Namatjira Family Legacy: A Contemporary Watercolour Exhibition presented by Palya Art
21 April- 02 August 2015	**British Museum**	Indigenous Australia: Enduring Civilisation

Appendix 2. List of objects in *Indigenous Australia: enduring civilisation*

Ref no.	Exhibition section	Sub section	Object	Institution	Institution accession number
1	1. Introduction		Pukara' (acrylic on canvas), by Roy Underwood, Leonard Walker, Simon Hogan, Ian Rictor. Pitjantjatjara Tjunttjuntjara, Great Victoria Desert, Western Australia, 2013	British Museum	2013,2035.1
2	2 Understanding country	2.1 Dreamings of Country	Painting of a kangaroo and human like figures, (pigment on bark), attributed to Port Essington, Northern Territory, likely before 1868	British Museum	Oc1967,+.1

3	2 Understanding country	2.1 Dreamings of Country	Painting of a human like figure, (pigment on bark), attributed to Port Essington, Northern Territory, likely before 1868	British Museum	Oc 1973,Q.17
4	2 Understanding country	2.1 Dreamings of Country	Bark painting depicting a barramundi, (natural pigment on bark), Gunbalanya, western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, c1961	British Museum	Oc1961,02.1
5	2 Understanding Country	2.1 Dreamings of Country	'Yingarna the Rainbow Serpent,' (natural pigment on bark), by Bilinyara Nabageyo, (c1920-1978), Yitrridjdja moiety, Kunwinjku, late 1960s or early 1970s	Pitt Rivers Museum	1982.12.1
6	2 Understanding Country	2.1 Dreamings of Country	Yathikpa ga Baraltja', (natural pigment on bark), by Bakulangay Marawili (1944-2002), Yirrkala, northeastern Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, c2002	British Museum	Oc2003,01.5

7	2 Understanding Country	2.1 Dreamings of Country	Wandjina painting, (pigment on composition board), Charlie Allungoy (Numbulmoore), (c1907-1971), Ngarinyin, Mowanjum, Kimberley region, Western Australia, 1970	National Museum of Australia	1985.0173.0012
8	2 Understanding Country	2.1 Dreamings of Country	Mask in the form of a human face, (turtle shell, shell, fibre), Mer, Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1855	British Museum	Oc1855,1220.169
9	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Pipe, (bamboo, incised and pigmented), Erub, Torres Strait, Queensland, c1842-1846	British Museum	Oc1846,0731.2
10	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Drum, (wood incised and pigmented), Erub, Torres Strait, Queensland, c1842-1846	British Museum	Oc1846,0731.1

11	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Model outrigger canoe, (wood, fibre), Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1870	British Museum	Oc.6933.a
12	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Makassar Boiling Down Trepang, (natural pigment on bark), Mathaman Marika (c1920-1970), Rirratinju clan, Dhuwa moiety, Yolngu, Yirrkala, northeastern Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, 1964	National Museum of Australia	1985.0259.0095
13	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Spear, (ironwood, gum), Eastern Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, before 1879	British Museum	Oc,Bk.132
14	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Spear, (mulgha wood, gum), Eastern Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, before 1879	British Museum	Oc,Bk.131

15	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Spear, (mulgha wood, gum), Eastern Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, before 1879	British Museum	Oc,Bk.128
16	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Bag, (fibre, human hair, natural pigment), Port Essington, Northern Territory, before 1912	British Museum	Oc1939,08.37
17	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Belt (pearl shells, bark, hair, pearl shell), Melbourne, Victoria, before 1870	British Museum	Oc 6014
18	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Pearl shell pendant, (pearl shell, natural pigment, human hair), Kimberley region, Western Australia, before 1954	British Museum	Oc1954,06.377

19	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Pearl shell pendant, (pearl shell, natural pigment), by Aubrey Tigan (1945-2013), Bardi and Djawi, Broome, Western Australia, c2012	British Museum	2012,2030.1
20	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Pearl shell pendant, (pearl shell, charcoal), Kimberley region, Western Australia, before 1926	British Museum	Oc1954,06.378
21	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Pearl shell pendant, (pearl shell, natural pigment), attributed to Cossack, Pilbara region, Western Australia, before 1896	British Museum	Oc1896,-.1041
22	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Pearl shell pendant, (pearl shell, natural pigment), attributed to Cossack, Western Australia, before 1896	British Museum	Oc1896,-.1039

23	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Pituri bag, (pituri leaf, fibre, wool, human hair), Gregory River region, Queensland c1891	British Museum	OC1897,-.634
24	3 Encounters in Country		Pituri bag, (pituri leaf, fibre, wool, human hair), Gregory River region, Queensland, before 1897	British Museum	Oc1897,-.636
25	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Grindstone with residue of red ochre, Swan River, Western Australia, c 1838	British Museum	Oc1839,0620.8
26	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Feather ornament (decorated with red ochre, feather, wood, fibre), Swan River, Western Australia, c1838	British Museum	Oc1839,0620.23

27	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Spear head wrapped in paperbark, (stone, paperbark, fibre, resin), collected, Groote Eylandt, Arnhem Land, c1923-1925	British Museum	Oc1925,1113.41
28	2 Understanding Country	2.2 Connected Countries	Axe head, (greenstone), Mount William, Victoria, before 1932	British Museum	Oc1932,0702.1
29	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Bark blanket, (fig tree bark, natural pigment), Atherton/Tully/Cardwell region, Queensland, before 1900	British Museum	Oc1900,0723.1
30	5 Drawing on Country		Decorated possum pelt, (possum skin, natural pigment), New South Wales, before 1868	British Museum	Oc.4571

31	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Coiled mat with pocket, (spiny head mat rush fibre), Southeast Australia, 1839-1849	British Museum	Oc,+.4674
32	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Magpie Geese/ water python, or Magpie Geese in the Arafura Swamp, (natural pigment on bark), by George Milpurrurru (1934-1998), Gurrumba Gurrumba clan, Yirritja moiety, Yolngu Ramingining, central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, 1988	British Museum	Oc1989,05.1
33	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Bark container, bark, gum, resin, fibre, spinifex fibre, cane fibre, boxwood, natural pigment, Kunmunya mission, Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1931	British Museum	Oc1953,03.6
34	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Vessel, (wood, natural pigment), Derby, Kimberley region, Western Australia, before 1896	Pitt Rivers Museum	1896.50.4

35	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Bicornual basket, (lawyer cane), Mulgrave River region, near Cairns, Queensland, before 1900	British Museum	Oc1933,0403.56
36	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Bicornual basket, (lawyer cane), Mulgrave River region, near Cairns, Queensland, before 1900	British Museum	Oc1933,0403.57
37	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Looped and knotted bag, (fibre), Cleveland, Queensland, late 19th century or early 20th century	British Museum	Oc1954,06.386
38	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Basket for carrying clubs, (fibre), Encounter Bay region, South Australia, before 1855	British Museum	Oc1855,1220.176

39	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Digging stick, (wood), Adelaide region, South Australia, c1848	British Museum	Oc1848,0821.2
40	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Ghost net basket, (synthetic fibre), Mahnag Angela Torenbeek (b1942), Wagalagai, Moa, Torres Strait, Queensland, 2010	British Museum	2011,2017.1
41	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Coconut water containers, (coconut, fibre), Mer, Torres Strait, Queensland, c1892	British Museum	Oc1922,1024.a-b
42	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Basket, (iris leaf fibre), Probably Oyster Cove, Tasmania, before 1868	British Museum	Oc.9895

43	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Fish trap, (fibre), Barron River region, near Cairns, Queensland c1900	British Museum	Oc1933,0403.51
44	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Spearthrower (possum skin cloak design), wood, Birregurra, Victoria, before 1867	British Museum	Oc.8067
45	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Cross boomerang, (wood, fibre, pigment), Mulgrave River region, near Cairns, Queensland, c1900	British Museum	Oc1933,0403.10
46	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Spearthrower, (wood, stone, resin), north-west Australia, late 19th or early 20th century	British Museum	Oc1980,Q.747

47	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Hooked boomerang, (wood, natural pigment), Tennant Creek region, Northern Territory, c1900	British Museum	Oc1903,0404.73
48	2 Understanding Country	2.3 Living off Country	Returning boomerang, (wood), Southeastern Australia, c1826-1836	British Museum	Oc1939,01.4
49	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Shield, (wood, natural pigment), Cossack, Western Australia, before 1896	British Museum	Oc1896,-.1025
50	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Shield, (wood, natural pigment), Broome region, Western Australia, c1885	British Museum	Oc,+.2419

51	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Rainforest shield, (wood, natural pigment - Reckitts Blue laundry whitener?), Mulgrave River region, near Cairns Queensland, c1900	British Museum	Oc1933,0403.9
52	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Broad shield, (wood, natural pigment), Adelaide Plains region, South Australia, before 1848	British Museum	Oc1848,0821.3
53	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Broad shield, (wood, natural pigment), South-east Australia, mid 19th century	British Museum	Oc1921,1014.79
54	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Shield, (wood), South-east Australia, before 1950	British Museum	Oc1950,04.10

55	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Parrying shield, (wood, natural pigment), attributed to Macquarie River, New South Wales, before 1894	British Museum	Oc1894,-.279
56	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1935,0413.10
57	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1935,0413.11
58	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1936,0310.29

59	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1981,Q.2147
60	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1973,04.1
61	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1933,1214.1
62	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1953,03.21

63	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1943,03.14
64	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1943,03.10
65	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1936,0310.34
66	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1936,0310.37

67	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1943,03.16
68	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1943,03.6
69	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1943,03.5
70	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1943,03.17

71	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1936,0310.23
72	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1898,0519.4
73	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1943,03.12
74	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1943,03.15

75	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1936,0310.16
76	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1936,0310.32
77	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1898,0519.2
78	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1950,07.11

79	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1933,0315.99
80	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1911,-.142
81	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1981,Q.2144
82	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1899,-.467

83	3 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1981,Q.2148
84	2 Understanding Country	2.4 Patterns of Country	Spear point (stone, glass, ceramic, gum or resin), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1885-1940	British Museum	Oc1907,-.193
85	2 Understanding Country	2.5 Torres Strait-Sea Country	Marriage ornaments, (turtle shell, pearl shell, ceramic, cotton, hair, cord), Mer, Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1889	British Museum	Oc,89+.57
86	2 Understanding Country	2.5 Torres Strait-Sea Country	Dugong charm, (stone, fibre, natural pigment), Tudu, Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1889	British Museum	Oc,89+.184

87	2 Understanding Country	2.5 Torres Strait-Sea Country	Canoe prow ornament, (wood, fibre, cowrie shell, cassowary feather), Dauar, Tores Strait, Queensland, before 1889	British Museum	Oc,89+.197
88	2 Understanding Country	2.5 Torres Strait-Sea Country	Fishing line,(fibre, turtle shell), Zuna, Torres Strait, Queensland, c1844	British Museum	Oc1978,Q.331
89	2 Understanding Country	2.5 Torres Strait-Sea Country	Drum, (wood, lizard skin, cassowary feather, goa nut, lime), Saibai, Torres Strait, Queensland, c1874-1886	British Museum	Oc,+.3401
90	4 Out of Country	2.5 Torres Strait-Sea Country	Human figures, (wood, hair - presumed human, cotton, vegetable fibre, coix seeds, pearl shell, cone shell), Erub Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1865	British Museum	Oc.6537

91	2 Understanding country	2.5 Torres Strait-Sea Country	Mask in the form of a human face and a bonito fish, (turtle shell, goa nut, cassowary feather, shell, paint), attributed to Kuduma, Muralag, collected Nagir, Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1888	British Museum	Oc,89+.74
92	2 Understanding Country	2.5 Torres Strait-Sea Country	Female figure of coral, Mer, Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1889	British Museum	Oc,89+.185
93	2 Understanding Country	2.5 Torres Strait-Sea Country	Crocodile mask, (turtle shell, wood, metal, fibre, goa nut, wool, fabric, human bone, cassowary feather, lime?), attributed to Nigi, Mabulag, Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1885	British Museum	Oc,+.2489
94	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	'Yumari', (acrylic on canvas), Uta Uta Tjangala (c1926-1990), Pintupi Papunya, Northern Territory, 1981	National Museum of Australia	NMA 1991.0024.4440

95	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	Bark belt, (stringy bark from Eucalyptus, natural pigment), attributed to Western Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, bfore 1926	British Museum	Oc1896,-.126
96	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	Didgeridoo, (wood, pigment), Groote Eylandt, Northern Territory, c1963	British Museum	Oc1965,03.3
97	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	Head ornament, (natural fibres, grass, wood, etc), North-west Australia, before 1926	British Museum	Oc1944,02.2106
98	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	Shell ornament, (nautilus shell, fibre), Mulgrave River region, near Cairns, Queensland, before 1895	British Museum	Oc1895,-.250

99	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	Shell ornament, (nautilus shell, fibre), Mulgrave River region, near Cairns, Queensland, c1900	British Museum	Oc1933,0403.46
100	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	Shield (front and reverse), (wood, natural pigment), attributed to Shoalhaven region, New South Wales, before 1862	British Museum	Oc.1809
101	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	Shield (front and reverse), (wood, natural pigment), attributed to Shoalhaven region, New South Wales, before 1862	British Museum	Oc.1808
102	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	Bark etching, (bark, natural pigment), Fernyhurst, Victoria, 1854	British Museum	OC.1827

103	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	Curved piece of bark, resembling the shape of an emu, Fennyhurst, Victoria, c1854	British Museum	Oc+.1281
104	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	Tunga (bark basket), Tiwi Islands, Northern Territory, before 1913.	British Museum	Oc1913,-.145
105	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	Feathered string, (feathers, fibre), North-east Arnhem Land, before 1896	British Museum	Oc1896,-.1052
106	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	Biting bag or spirit bag, (fibre, cotton), Arnhem Land, Northern Territory before 1896	British Museum	Oc1896,-.118

107	2 Understanding Country	2.6 Communicating with Country	Barama / Captain Cook at the sacred water hole of Gangan. Gawirrin Gumana, about 2002. Yolngu, Yirritja moiety, Dhalwangu clan.	British Museum	Oc2003,01.2
108	3 Encounters in Country	3.1 Early European Contacts and Outposts	Shield, (red mangrove), possibly collected Botany Bay, before 1770.	British Museum	Oc1978,Q.839
109	3 Encounters in Country	3.1 Early European Contacts and Outposts	Undiscovered#4, (Inkjet on paper) by Michael Cook (born 1968), Bidjara Brisbane, Queensland, 2010	National Museum of Australia	IR 6338.0004
110	3 Encounters in Country	3.1 Early European Contacts and Outposts	People in canoes at Botany Bay, (pencil and watercolour on paper) by Tupaia (c. 1725-1770), Botany Bay, New South Wales 1770	British Library	Add.15508,F.10

111	3 Encounters in Country	3.1 Early European Contacts and Outposts	Cook's Chart of Botany Bay (coloured and inscribed), Ink on paper, Britain, after 1771	British Library	Add. 31360, No.32
112	3 Encounters in Country	3.1 Early European Contacts and Outposts	Captain Cook with the Declaration, (acryllic on canvas) by Vincent Namatjira (born 1983), Pitjanttjatjara. Indulkana, South Australia, 2014	British Museum	2014,2007.1
113	3 Encounters in Country	3.1 Early European Contacts and Outposts	Notebook of Lieutenant William Dawes (1776-1836), (ink on paper), Sydney region, New South Wales,1790-1791	SOAS	MS 41645
114	3 Encounters in Country	3.1 Early European Contacts and Outposts	Fishing spear, (wood), Port Jackson, New South Wales, before 1844	British Museum	Oc 944

115	4 Encounters in Country	3.1 Early European Contacts and Outposts	Hunting spear, (wood), Port Jackson, New South Wales, before 1844	British Museum	Oc.955
116	3 Encounters in Country	3.1 Early European Contacts and Outposts	Honey gathering hook, (wood, resin, fibre), Swan River, Western Australia, c 1838	British Museum	OC1839,0620.65
117	3 Encounters in Country	3.1 Early European Contacts and Outposts	String bag, (Illawarra flame tree bark fibre),Port Jackson Region, New South Wales, before 1844	British Museum	Oc.4061
118	3 Encounters in Country	3.1 Early European Contacts and Outposts	Digging stick, (wood), Swan River, Western Australia, c1838	British Museum	Oc 1839.0620.32

119	3 Encounters in Country	3.1 Early European Contacts and Outposts	Basket, (fibre, natural pigment), Port Essington, Northern Territory, before 1855	British Museum	OC1855,1220.175
120	3 Encounters in Country	3.2 Exile and Encroachment	Shell necklace, (maireener shell), fibre, Flinders Island, Tasmania, before 1846	British Museum	Oc1846. 0729.2
121	3 Encounters in Country	3.2 Exile and Encroachment	Club, (wood), Flinders Island, Tasmania, before 1846	British Museum	Oc1921,1014.81
122	3 Encounters in Country	3.2 Exile and Encroachment	Proclamation board, (paint on board), Tasmania, c1829	Cambridge Museum Archaeology & Anthropology	Z15346

123	3 Encounters in Country	3.2 Exile and Encroachment	Tanganutara or 'Sarah', (watercolour on paper), by John Skinner Prout, (1805-1876), born Plymouth, England. Tasmania, 1845	British Museum	Oc2006,Drg.12
124	3 Encounters in Country	3.2 Exile and Encroachment	Portrait of man - 'King Tippoo' , (watercolour on paper), by John Skinner Prout, (1805-1876), born Plymouth, England. Tasmania, 1845	British Museum	Oc2006,Drg.18
125	3 Encounters in Country	3.2 Exile and Encroachment	Ceremony, (watercolour, graphite and ochre on paper), by William Barak (1824-1903), Wurundjeri/Woiwurung, Victoria 1895	National Museum of Australia	2004.0071.0001
126	3 Encounters in Country	3.2 Exile and Encroachment	The Batman land deed (counterpart), (ink on vellum with wax seal), Victoria, 1835	British Library	Add Ch 37766

127	3 Encounters in Country	3.2 Exile and Encroachment	Emu feather skirt, (emu feather, fibre), Victoria 1840s	British Museum	Oc1981,Q.1757
128	3 Encounters in Country	3.2 Exile and Encroachment	Wallaby teeth necklace, (plant fibre, animal skin, swamp wallaby tooth), Warrnambool District, Western Victoria, before 1847	British Museum	Oc1847,0413.1
129	3 Encounters in Country	3.2 Exile and Encroachment	The Promise' (found chair, shadow casting LED light, kangaroo skin silhoettes) by Julie Gough (b1965), Hobart, 2011	Loaned by artist	
130	3 Encounters in Country	3.3 Exploration and Indigenous Knowledge	Net, (fibre), Murray River, border of Victoria and New South Wales, before 1837	British Museum	Oc1839,1012.9

131	3 Encounters in Country	3.3 Exploration and Indigenous Knowledge	Spear head, (stone), Hanover Bay, Western Australia, before 1821	British Museum	Oc.8767
132	3 Encounters in Country	3.3 Exploration and Indigenous Knowledge	Club, belonging to Bungaree, (wood), Sydney region, New South Wales, before 1830	Pitt Rivers Museum	1900.55.57
133	3 Encounters in Country	3.3 Exploration and Indigenous Knowledge	String bag, (fibre), Darling River, New South Wales, before 1837	British Museum	Oc1839,1012.6
134	3 Encounters in Country	3.3 Exploration and Indigenous Knowledge	Hafted axe, (wood, stone, grass tree resin), Albany, Wester Australia, c1830s	British Museum	Oc.4768

135	3 Encounters in Country	3.3 Exploration and Indigenous Knowledge	Knife, (wood, quartz, resin), Albany, Western Australia, c1830s	British Museum	Oc.4774
136	3 Encounters in Country	3.3 Exploration and Indigenous Knowledge	Breastplate, (brass), engraved by Xavier Arnoldi (1823-1876) Melbourne, Victoria c 1892	National Museum of Australia	IR 4974.0001
137	3 Encounters in Country	3.3 Exploration and Indigenous Knowledge	Hand axe, stone, collected during the 1860 - 1861 exploring expedition led by Burke and Wills	British Museum	Oc.9127
138	3 Encounters in Country	3.3 Exploration and Indigenous Knowledge	Boomerang, (wood), Murray River, border of Victoria and New South Wales, before 1839	British Museum	OC1839,1012.2

139	3 Encounters in Country	3.4 Expanding Frontiers	Boomerang attributed to Jandamarra, (wood, pigment), Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1890s	Museum Victoria	X 49848
140	3 Encounters in Country	3.4 Expanding Frontiers	Spear with a point of green glass, (glass, wood, sinew?, gum),Kimberley region, Western Australia, c1890s	British Museum	Oc1899,-.461
141	3 Encounters in Country	3.4 Expanding Frontiers	Shield, (fig tree wood, natural pigment), Rockingham Bay, Queensland, before 1872	British Museum	Oc.7696
142	3 Encounters in Country	3.4 Expanding Frontiers	Woman's head band, (sandstone, deset bloodwood gum, clay, flax lily fibre, bark fibre, fresh water mussel shell), by Norwunjunger (Mary) Yirandali, Lammermoor, Queensland, before 1901	British Museum	Oc1901,1221.14

143	3 Encounters in Country	3.4 Expanding Frontiers	Woman's skirt, (wool, animal teeth), Lammermoor, Queensland, before 1904	British Museum	Oc1904.1002.5a
144	3 Encounters in Country	3.4 Expanding Frontiers	Message stick, (wood), Western Australia, before 1885	British Museum	Oc,+.2424
145	3 Encounters in Country	3.4 Expanding Frontiers	Message stick, (wood), by Nowunjunger (Mary), Yirandali people, Lammermoor, Queensland, late 19th century	British Museum	Oc1901,1221.18
146	3 Encounters in Country	3.4 Expanding Frontiers	Message stick, (pinewood, charcoal, emu fat), by Mickey, Yirandali people, Lammermoor, Queensland, late 19th century	British Museum	Oc1901,1221.17

147	3 Encounters in Country	3.4 Expanding Frontiers	Message stick, (pinewood), unknown maker, Lammermoor, Queensland, late 19th century	British Museum	Oc1901,1221.20
148	3 Encounters in Country	3.4 Expanding Frontiers	Message stick, (wood), Rottnest Island, Western Australia, before 1903	British Museum	Oc1950,03.1
149	3 Encounters in Country	3.4 Expanding Frontiers	Message stick, (wood), Cairns, Queensland, before 1900	British Museum	Oc1900,0723.59
150	3 Encounters in Country	3.4 Expanding Frontiers	Mistake Creek Massacre, (pigment on canvas), by Queenie McKenzie (c 1930-1998), Gija Kimberley region, Western Australia, 1997	National Museum of Australia	AR00196.001

151	3 Encounters in Country	3.5 Exclusion and Inclusion	Shield, (wood, natural pigment), attributed to Peter Mungett (also known as Lallan Yerring, c 1831 - ?),Pentridge Prison, Melbourne, Victoria, 1860s	British Museum	Oc.1819
152	3 Encounters in Country	3.5 Exclusion and Inclusion	Spearthrower, (wood), attributed to Douga Willin (of Bruthen, Gippsland, Victoria), Pentridge Prison, Melbourne, Victoria, 1860s	British Museum	Oc.1851
153	3 Encounters in Country	3.5 Exclusion and Inclusion	Dancing Figure (drawing of a ceremony), (ink on paper), Unknown artist, Noongar, Carrolup Native Settlement, Western Australia, 1945-1953	British Museum	Oc2006,Drg.686
154	3 Encounters in Country	3.5 Exclusion and Inclusion	River Gum and Mount Gillen, (watercolour over pencil, on pape)r, by Albert Namatjira (1902 -1959), Arrente, Northern Territory, Alice Springs Region, c1951	British Museum	2011,7082.1

155	3 Encounters in Country	3.5 Exclusion and Inclusion	Postcard of a man at Corranderk, (ink on card), Corranderk, Healesville, Victoria, Early 20th century	British Museum	Oc,B141.15
156	3 Encounters in Country	3.5 Exclusion and Inclusion	Postcard of an Aboriginal family ('four generations'), (ink on card), South east Australia, early 20th century	British Museum	Oc,B141.12
157	3 Encounters in Country	3.5 Exclusion and Inclusion	Postcard of two men at Lake Tyers, (ink on card), Lake Tyers, Gippsland Victoria, early 20th century	British Museum	Oc,B141.21
158	3 Encounters in Country	3.5 Exclusion and Inclusion	Postcard of women and girls at Albany,(ink on card), Albany, Western Australia, early 20th century	British Museum	Oc,B141.11

159	3 Encounters in Country	3.6 Recognition of rights to land	Garden charm, (wood, pigment). Mer, Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1889	British Museum	Oc,89+.176
160	3 Encounters in Country	3.6 Recognition of rights to land	Dhari, (headdress), (cane, cockatoo feather, cassowary feather, pigeon?, coix seeds, cotton), Tudu, Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1889	British Museum	Oc,89+.93
161	3 Encounters in Country	3.6 Recognition of rights to land	Hoe, (wood, shell), Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1889	British Museum	Oc,89+.214
162	3 Encounters in Country	3.6 Recognition of rights to land	Kungkarangkalpa,', (acrylic on canvas), by Myrtle Pennington, Ngalpingka Sims, Kunmanara Hogan, Yarangka Thomas, Tjaruwa Woods. Tjuntjuntjara, Great Victora Desert, Western Australia, 2013	British Museum	2014,2009.1

163	3 Encounters in Country	3.6 Recognition of rights to land	Basket, (plant fibre, wool), by Yuwali, also known as Janice Nixon (b.c1947), Parrngurr, Western Australia, c2010	British Museum	2011.2011.2
164	3 Encounters in Country	3.6 Recognition of rights to land	Land rights placard, (paint on maisonite board), Old Parliament House, Canberra, 1972	National Museum of Australia	1987.0090.0001
165	4 Out of Country		T-shirt 'lutrawita has a black history', (cotton), Tasmania, c2000-2006	British Museum	2013,2027.1
166	4 Out of Country		Club belonging to Jungunjinuke, (wood), Victoria before 1868	MCC (Lords Cricket Ground)	M 47.1

167	4 Out of Country		Model canoe, (bark), probably Oyster Cove, Tasmania, c1850-1851	British Museum	Oc1851,1122.3
168	4 Out of Country		Kelp water container, (bull kelp, tea tree wood, fibre), probably Oyster Cove, Tasmania, c1851	British Museum	Oc1851,1122.2
169	4 Out of Country		Shell necklace, (maireener shell, fibre), probably Oyster Cove, Tasmania, before 1851	British Museum	Oc1851,1122.4
170	4 Out of Country		Head ornament,(fibre, cassowary feather), Tudu, Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1888	British Museum	Oc,89+.80.a

171	4 Out of Country		Head ornament, (wool, glass fibre, cassowary feather), tudu, Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1888	British Museum	OC,89+.80.b
172	4 Out of Country		Crocodile mask, (wool, wongi wood and many other materials), made by Maino (c1863-1939) at Iama. Collected at Tudu, Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1888	British Museum	Oc,89+.73
173	4 Out of Country		Dance ornament, (wood, fibre, feather, cane, bamboo, natural pigment), Tudu, Torres Strait, Queensland, before 1888	British Museum	Oc,89+.94
174	4 Out of Country		The holes in the land 3' (four plate etching) by Judy Watson, 2015	British Museum	2015,2004.3

175	4 Out of Country		The holes in the land 4'(four plate etching) by Judy Watson, 2015	British Museum	2015,2004.4
176	5 Drawing on Country		Jawun', Abe Muriata, 2015	British Museum	2015,2007.1