Hidden Treasures of Launceston

Exhibition Curators: Malcom Bywaters
Scott Cunningham
'A dream of connectedness…'

The collection is not constructed by its elements; rather, it comes to exist by means of its principles of organisation. If that principle is bounded at the onset of the collection, the collection will be finite, or at least potentially finite. If that principle tends towards infinity or series itself, the collection will be open-ended. (Stewart, 1993, 155)

Stafford’s observation goes to the heart of collecting; that it is as much about the collector as it is about the objects that are brought into an expanding arrangement of apparently similar or related objects. She immediately signals the curatorial hand, the ‘grasp’, that makes the links between objects and that draws them together into the desired or accessible visual narrative.

With any collection, whether kept in locked cabinets, purpose-built storage, or scattered around a family home, the collector understands that collection as a whole, as an entire narrative, one with an infinite number of variations all taking place within the covers of one book, so to speak. Even if not being able to be seen in its entirety, the collection is perceived as sharing the same time and place. This effectively removes all objects in a collection from any other context. The past of an object – its provenance and the context of making or commissioning – is brought into the collection inseparable from the object’s materiality. Narratives are generated by the objects, whereas the collection as an object, ‘is generated by means of narrative’, as Susan Stewart observes. Even when a formal history is missing, the material speaks, providing a context where none might otherwise now be spoken.

An example of the generated narrative might be found most easily in the Cabinet of Curiosities, a collection within this exhibition-as-collection, in which at least four objects are sourced from elephants, while in almost every other object can be found a reference to the animal kingdom, understanding that humans can be of that division...
in either a scientific and theological sense. Pliny observed that ‘elephant teeth’ or ivory was ‘the material most esteemed for the statue of the gods.’ Chryselephantine or ivory-based mixed media sculpture of the late 19th century also advertised the wealth available from the imperial project, combining both the idea of the trophy, and that of the bizarre or exotic. Here, the discernment of the collector is at play even when some of the connecting stories and narratives – of the worst excesses and activities of empire – are not to contemporary taste but the object, often redefined by rarity or craft, perpetuates its time and place.

There is a connectedness in all collections – we just have to find it, to increase our knowledge so as the narratives can flow. In a collection, individual objects, including paintings, are brought together in a thematic way – although the theme may take some time to reveal itself, even to the collector. Although some collections are simply maintained in perpetuity, with the collector as caretaker, most collections are continually sifted and pruned, dispersed and re-arranged. Others are built relatively quickly, with the collector seeing their role as to bring together certain objects by channelling them through their collection to those of others, perhaps institutions. Whether the collection is brought together serendipitously, as a result of the hunt or the chase, or through long and contemplative acquisition, the moment of realisation of a connectedness between objects is always there.

Now these fragments of collections have been removed from their usual times and places, and framed as a new collection. In one sense the curators have become collectors, mining known sources for objects to bring together in a narrative now called Hidden Treasures of Launceston. Like any Wunderkammer this collection is idiosyncratic, dynamic and highly selective. It is, indeed, a miscellany, a brief search on Google, a complex of associations that don’t always make sense when first downloaded. Although place is stated as the organising principle of the exhibition, how that place has informed the context of the collections is less obvious. Yet Tasmanian, indeed Launceston, connections abound, beyond that of the collectors, although largely in contexts beyond the objects themselves. The narrative remains open for the viewer to resolve, to pursue the dream of connectedness.”

Dr Deborah Malor
April 2012

REFERENCES
Stewart, S, 1993, On longing: narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection, Duke University Press, Durham and London
intent; for the love of objects; and the creation of a
maintaining connectedness as memory; for the
of assets; serendipitous family accumulation,
acquisition and perhaps the subsequent disposal
These might include: for investment through the
exquisite things, had much to say on this) through
of the self (Freud, a great collector of small and
Collecting is often explained as the expression
intimate grasp of our very being’. It was, she wrote,
‘the encyclopaedic will to comprehend remote
Stafford observed that this collection represented
the collage of ideas, objects and images that
into the sphere of like objects. In talking about
the distinctiveness of the single treasured object
narratives, to make connections, to recognise that
be open-ended. (Stewart, 1993, 155)

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ARTWORK LIST

1. John Glover
   Murchington Woodlands, Staffordshire
   Finished on my 69th birthday Feb 10th 1836
   the pleasure of Studying the Works of the Almighty full immersing
   1836
   Oil on canvas
   110cm x 73cm framed
   Collection of John Millwood

2. Frederick Strange
   St. John Street, Launceston
   1855
   Water colour on paper
   53cm x 43cm framed
   Collection of John Millwood

3. Thomas Bock
   Mrs Mary Burbury, Daniel and Mary
   1845
   Water colour and crayon on paper
   75cm x 65cm framed
   Collection of John Millwood

4. Thomas Bock
   Caroline, William and Henry Burbury
   1845
   Water colour and crayon on paper
   75cm x 65cm framed
   Collection of John Millwood

5. Edith Holmes
   Bringing in the Harvest
   1943
   Oil on board
   54.5cm x 34.5cm
   Private collection

6. John Olsen
   Wimmera Rainbow
   1970
   Gouache on paper
   65cm x 46cm
   Private collection

7. Charles Blackman
   Face to Face
   1963
   Oil on canvas
   137cm x 109cm
   Private collection

8. Barry Humphries
   Mt Wilson Adelaide
   2004
   Oil on canvas
   61cm x 45.5cm
   Private collection

9. Joy Hester
   Portrait of John Reed
   Date unknown
   Ink and watercolour on paper
   25cm x 30.5cm
   Private collection

10. Frans Franken II (Franken the Younger)
    Jesus entering Jerusalem, Palm Sunday
    Date circa 1600 - 1642
    Oil on board
    52cm x 81cm
    Private collection

11. Rover Thomas
    Wolf Creek Crater
    Date unknown
    Pigment paint on canvas
    138cm x 198cm
    Private collection

12. Charles Blackman
    The Garden of Carnavale
    1975
    Woven in Portugal
    213cm x 426cm
    Collection of Genevieve de Couvreur

13. Charles Blackman
    School Girl with Cat
    1953
    Oil on board
    74cm x 61cm unframed
    Collection of Genevieve de Couvreur

14. Russel Drysdale
    School Girl with Cat
    1953
    Oil on board
    74cm x 61cm unframed
    Collection of Genevieve de Couvreur

15. Arnold Shore
    Flowerpiece
    1937
    Oil on canvas
    89.5cm x 77cm
    Collection of Batmen Superannuation Trust

16. A Cabinet of Curiosities
    On loan from JB Hawkins Antiques, ‘Bentley’ Chudleigh, Tasmania

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Malcom Bywaters
Scott Cunningham
Exhibition Curators
The exhibition curators would like to acknowledge the generosity of the following contributors who loaned artworks for the Hidden Treasures of Launceston exhibition.

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