

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by Virginia Lovett Churchill Fellow 2006

To undertake research in major museums and galleries that engage techniques and practitioners to develop innovative, fun and experiential based learning programs for families with children and youth.

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Signed

Dated

## **Introduction**

It is an old cliché, but if you open yourself up to new experiences and different cultures, travel can broaden the mind. Travelling for study or work can fire up your imagination, reignite passion for your profession, and bring into focus the things that can be done better or improved. For Australians, sitting at the bottom of the world, it is also empowering to discover that in many cases - in my industry in particular - we are leading the way.

My Churchill Fellowship was an enormous source of pride for my family and for me. It enabled me to travel and visit not only some of the greatest art and museum collections in the world, but also to talk to overseas colleagues about emerging trends in programming for families, children and young adults.

I would like to thank the Trust for the opportunity this Fellowship gave me, it truly was a once in a lifetime experience.

## **Executive Summary**

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The Fellowship travel was undertaken between 14 March and May 1 2007. The aim of the fellowship was to study. I visited a number of art galleries and museums in Paris, London, Manchester, New York, Chicago and Minneapolis.

## **Highlights**

- Meeting Sarah Briggs and discussing family programming at Tate Britain
- Observing the art after school program at Guggenheim Museum, New York
- Meeting with Duke Dang from Works and Process Inc at the Guggenheim
- Experiencing the Museum and Industry museum in Chicago
- Meeting with Shan McLennan and Honor Wilson-Fletcher from the SouthBank Centre, London.
- Meeting with Cari Frisch, education staff at MOMA, NY
- Being able to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York 6 times and MOMA 3 times.
- Visiting the Walker Art Centre in Minneapolis
- Visiting the Chicago Children's Museum, Chicago
- Visiting the Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago.

## **Recommendations**

Australian art administrators should attend and give papers at overseas conferences and promote the innovative and creative work that is being done in our museums and art galleries.

We should retain focus on the visitor experience and ensure that we make museums and art galleries relevant and an attractive leisure option, particularly in the very overcrowded family, children and teenage market.

Continue to develop and commission creative and innovative museum programs and events to develop a reputation as world leaders in this field.

**Implementation and Dissemination**

The report will be disseminated through industry related publications and presentations at industry forums.

## **Fellowship Programme**

### Paris 15 -19 March 2007

Cite des Sciences & Industries, La Villette  
Musée du Quai Branly  
L'Orangerie  
Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle  
Centre Pompidou  
Musée Arts et Métiers  
Musée Picasso

### London 19 March – 3 April

Natural History Museum  
V&A  
Tate Britain  
Tate Modern  
Imperial War Museum, Lambeth  
SouthBank  
National Gallery  
Serpentine  
Science Museum  
Museum of London & Museum in Docklands  
Kensington Palace  
Imperial War Museum, Manchester

### New York 3 April – 2 May

Metropolitan Museum of Art  
Guggenheim Museum  
The Frick Museum  
American Museum of Natural History  
Hayden Planetarium  
Museum of Folk Art  
Museum of Modern Art  
The Cloisters  
Brooklyn Museum  
Brooklyn Children's Museum  
Manhattan Children's Museum  
Tenement House  
New York City Museum

Chicago 18 –20 April

Chicago Children's Museum  
Museum of Science and Industry  
Museum of Contemporary Art  
Frank Lloyd Wright's Studio

Minneapolis 20-22 April

Walker Art Centre  
Minneapolis Institute of Arts

2 May return to Australia.

## Report

I am sitting in an air raid shelter, the air is thick with the acrid smell of smoke and the siren wails ominously. I have a family of four next to me and an elderly couple and a backpacker opposite. The shelter trembles and dust trickles from above as another bomb falls in the distance. The air raid warden instructs us on the rules of the shelter, rations, and blankets. Finally it is safe to leave and we can go out to survey the damage. Shops have been bombed, some fires are still alight, we are careful about where we step.

The elderly man says to his wife in a thick cockney accent, "It was just like this in the Blitz" and their faces show the memories of a war that the children opposite have suddenly stepped back in to. This is not the theatre of war but the theatre of museums at the Imperial War Museum in Lambeth.

Two days later I am in the Natural History Museum in Kensington after walking along the fantastic, specially constructed canopy walk above the dinosaur gallery, the museum's most popular attraction. I come face to face with a six million dollar, fully operational, life size, animatronics roaring Tyrannosaurus Rex. A similar T Rex had just toured Australia in the arena spectacular *Walking with Dinosaurs* to sell out crowds, and a few weeks later, in one of the biggest toyshops in the world, New York's FAO Schwartz, I am again face to face with a life size roaring T-Rex.

Welcome to edutainment.

On another floor of the Natural History Museum I am experiencing an earthquake in Kyoto. The floor shakes and moves under me, cans and jars of food fall violently from the shelves, and on the screen above I see the actual store in Japan going through the real earthquake this interactive is modelled on and I am actually feeling fear. Unlike the children in front of the T-Rex, some who were quite petrified, the students in the earthquake are a little older and are a little more blasé.

Museums and art galleries can no longer rely on exhibitions and permanent collections to motivate visitation. With shrinking government funding and tough competition in key market segments, particularly family - children and early teens - institutions have had to become more customer focused. By using performance, immersive experiences and innovative programming, museums and art galleries are now turning into a form of 'edutainment' to satisfy a very discerning and rather spoilt audience.

The Churchill Fellowship enabled me to visit museums and art galleries in Paris, London, Manchester, New York, Chicago and Minneapolis, where I was able to observe a number of different programs and talk to colleagues in museums and art galleries about the benefits to the organisation and delivered experience to the patron. In the end I narrowed my field of study down to the 'families with children' market.

Many of the organisations I visited are leaders in their field. Their collections are world famous and have audience visitation that is extraordinary. For example while I was at MOMA on Good Friday 17,000 people came through the door. The Metropolitan Museum of Art attracts on average 4 million visitors per year.

Although many 'big' overseas institutions offer programs for the families with children market, this does not seem to be part of a strategic plan to motivate visitation. Their programs were in place to enhance the visitor experience. This of course leads to repeat visitation, better customer service and greater response and interpretation of the collection.

There were exceptions to the rule.

Tate Britain is engaging the families with children audience through various methods, from a creating a whole brand package to a back fence, community advocacy approach.

The Tate has research to show there are a number of barriers to family visitation. From the perception of it being elitist and "nothing in there of interest for me or my children" to the physical barrier of the stairs out the front.

Taking all of this on board, the Tate set out to become 'family friendly'. They took advantage of a government initiative called 'Sure Start' to employ a coordinator to go out into the surrounding borough of Westminster and give presentations on Tate Britain and the benefits the institution could bring to children. They created a program called the Tiny Tate festival, which was held on the lawns outside the museum. At the festival they enlarged images from the collection featuring pastoral landscapes, brought in farm animals for the children and then held drawing classes. They offered incentives to break down other 'perceived' barriers such as free tea and coffee on arrival and someone to explain the ins and outs of the galleries, such as the café and how to access the building once they had made those first steps through the door.

A family 'brand' was created and family bags were given out when families arrived at the Tate. The bags had a panel so when the child completed a drawing it could be slotted in on the side of the bag to be proudly displayed by the parent or carer. In the café, families are encouraged to eat well, again with the Tate family brand present over the family lunch bags.

The whole of the museum approach to encouraging families and children has been a success for the Tate across both sites, Britain and Modern, with an increase in family audience and repeat visitation.

Programs for the 13-19 age groups are peer-led with a range of forums and live music to attract and motivate visitation. Again they have created a brand for this age group and use marketing strategies specific to this demographic i.e. mainly web, viral e-campaigns, sms and radio.

Down the river the redeveloped SouthBank Centre is also engaged in extensive mapping of its new facilities and ways to make them 'family friendly'. When I was there SBC was working methodically through each venue and space looking at attitudinal barriers that affect the family segment. Since the 1950s many things had changed - it was time to put nappy change facilities in the men's toilets.

The redevelopment has afforded the SouthBank Centre an opportunity to re-establish itself as a destination for families to fully engage, from seeing performances to eating in the cafes. Many people have fond memories of the SBC in the 50s as a community meeting place; the aim of the redevelopment is to reignite those memories and introduce a new generation to this London icon. With this community link, family and multicultural programming such as intergenerational storytelling will play a big part in the Centre's programming in a number of public spaces. It is an obvious way of connecting the new SBC with its immediate neighbourhood audience.

For 37 years The Solomon R Guggenheim museum in New York has offered a program called Learning through Art, where the museum sends artists into schools.

The museum recently commissioned a study on Learning through Art and during my visit the second year of the study was released to considerable media attention. The study posed the question: 'Does learning about painting and sculpture help kids become better students?' Hundreds of Grade three students from across New York City were interviewed. The study found that students in the program performed better in six categories of literacy and critical thinking skills, including thorough description, hypothesizing and reasoning, than students who were not in the program.

I observed another education program for one afternoon at the Guggenheim – Art after School. After listening to a group of eight year olds, who were more articulate about Kandinsky than I will probably ever be, the education officer told me many of the children attending treat the museum as their second home and "know the place and collection better than I do". It struck me that even though these are some of the most famous art museums in the world, in a city such as New York where real estate is at a premium, art and galleries offered a unique setting for play and socialising for children of a certain age and demographic.

Works and Process at the Guggenheim is an interesting and highly successful organisation. Under the direction of Mary Sharp Cronson, Works and Process has staged over 300 productions which explore the creative process by providing a behind-the-scenes insight into music, dance, science and theatrical performance. All performances are presented at the Guggenheim. The organisation does not sit within the Museum's structure but is an incorporated company underwritten by the producer Mary Sharp Cronson.

Works and Process productions contribute to the museum's audience development - 52% of the ticket buyers are members of the Guggenheim - while the remaining audience segment is predominately young, 'downtown', culturally active adults.

This was one of the very few programs I observed that was successfully developing new audiences by engaging in cross-cultural art forms.

Along New York's famous Museum mile stands majestically the grand dame of museums, the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In 2001 a museum-wide effort to make the Met a destination for families was implemented under the banner Family Initiative. In a 2004 issue of *Time Out New York Kids* (a bible amongst PR and marketers in NYC) the Museum was ranked third as a family destination in a survey conducted among parents.

Some of the initiatives included visitor services – family greeters were hired and trained and now act as ‘concierges for families’ on weekends and holiday Mondays. Security officers were also given special training to deal with families. Special children’s menus were developed for the cafe and new family programming was introduced.

The Metropolitan Museum is also aiming to become a place where families can learn together and become repeat visitors. The programs are designed to meet the different age groups, time constraints and art experience of family visitors. In 2006 just over 19,000 people participated in the Met’s family programs which, given their high annual visitation, shows there is still room for growth.

The Met also offers an offsite program for families and young people called Meet the Met. This program has produced some 237 events reaching over 5000 people; with the inclusion of citywide festivals the program exposed over 57,000 people to the Metropolitan’s collection.

One of the most interesting and exciting museums I visited, which is using interpretative theatre, multimedia actor presentations and immersive experiences, was Chicago’s Museum of Science and Industry. A highlight was taking the record-breaking 1934 train ride from Denver to Chicago on the Pioneer Zephyr. Inside, actors and multimedia bring the trip to life by re-creating the key people and the milestones of the trip. Another popular attraction is descending into a real coal mine and visiting an actual submarine. All are brought to life by role playing museum interpreters or multimedia presentations. The collection and its history are brought to life in an engaging and educational way proving that learning can be fun and museums don’t have to be dusty and old.

Due to our smaller population, percentage of cultural tourists, and funding base from state and government bodies, many Australian institutions rely on stand alone public programming or events to drive visitation.

Because of this, I believe that many Australian cultural institutions are leading in the way in creating innovative and strategic programs to motivate key segments such as the family and children’s market. Australian art galleries and museums are devising and

developing groundbreaking programs using cross-disciplinary art forms, and also aligning these programs with new media such as the internet, blogs and strategic brand marketing to motivate visitation and ensure the experience is truly satisfying.

Museums have entered a new age of 'edutainment', it is customer focused and has the capacity to reignite an enormous interest in our history, our collections and our stories if presented in an entertaining and thoughtful way. Museums don't have to be old and boring; they can be fun and should be considered high above a visit to the shopping centre as a leisure activity.