TRADITIONAL PICTURE FRAME MAKING TECHNIQUES AND, THE RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION OF 19TH CENTURY PICTURE FRAMES

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Robert Zilli, James Love Churchill Fellowship 2015
THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA


The James Love Churchill Fellowship to study traditional picture frame making techniques, and the research and documentation of 19th Century picture frames – UK

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Signed Robert Zilli    Dated 12 September 2016
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  TATE Britain, Millbank  
  Guildhall Art Gallery, Guildhall Yard  
  Victoria and Albert Museum, Cromwell Road  
  The National Gallery, Trafalgar Square  
  The Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House, Strand  
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REFERENCE
Introduction and Acknowledgments

As outlined in my Fellowship application, the objectives of my James Love Churchill Fellowship were to study traditional picture frame making techniques and research and document historical 19th century picture frames. Through the observation and participation of working alongside highly trained professionals in the field of traditional frame making I was able to gain an insight into the use of materials, tools and techniques that are not readily accessible in Australia. During the research and documentation phase of my Fellowship of historical picture frames, specifically focusing on the 19th century and the trade between Britain and Australia, what became evident is the immensity of this proposal due to the extent of picture frames that were manufactured and traded during that period. The outcome of this component of my Fellowship has laid the groundwork that will lead to further research into this fascinating area of art history. It has also highlighted the necessity to record and document the vast nomenclature of frame ornamentation, as there is limited literature currently available on this specific topic. A resource clearly defining picture frame ornamentation, through an agreed naming convention and images, would be an invaluable addition to the history of decorative arts not only for picture frame makers but also architects, conservators, historians, researchers, artists and academics.

With the technical advancements of the 21st century and through globalization the probability that traditional skills such as picture framing will be lost is very real. With the advent of technologies such as 3D scanning and printing the picture frames of the not so distant future will, I have no doubt, be manufactured using these processes. The inevitability that this will become a reality does not disturb me. On the whole I am not perturbed with this prospect; I have no Neo-Luddite tendencies. My concern lies in my belief that the need to retain traditional skills, in any field, is an essential link that connects us to our past, keeps us grounded in our present and preserves skills into the future.

Through the generous financial support provided by the James Love Churchill Fellowship, this privilege enabled me to gain access to major London art museums that provided a unique opportunity to work alongside picture framing professionals from various European backgrounds. The professional training undertaken by the staff, in the institutions I visited, was grounded in various traditional disciplines, such as woodcarving, gilding and picture frame making.

I would like to sincerely thank the James Simpson Love Trust, whose financial support enabled my Fellowship to be undertaken and Winston Churchill Trust for making this most extraordinary experience possible. I would also like thank the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art in affording me the time to undertake my Fellowship and to acknowledge my present colleagues at QAGOMA, Chris Saines, Amanda Pagliarino, Damian Buckley and Ruth McDougall. Past Queensland Art Gallery colleagues who have encouraged my lifelong passion Doug Hall, John Hook and Paul Curson, thank you for your support over the years. And I would like to acknowledge Lydia Falkenhagen for encouraging me to apply to the Churchill Trust, my wife Dr. Hayley Linthwaite and our families and friends.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Project Description
To study traditional picture frame making techniques, research and document 19th Century picture frames. The fellowship was divided into two sections, applied and theoretical.
The applied component took place as two separate residencies of five weeks each, at the framing departments of the National Gallery, London and The Guildhall Art Gallery, London. The scope involved working alongside the country’s leading traditionally trained picture frame makers, gilders and carvers on projects ranging from constructing historically accurate reproduction frames through to contemporary picture frames using traditional methods of manufacture.
The theoretical component was the documentation of 19th Century British picture frame makers and their frames with direct links to the 19th Century Australian picture frame making industry.

Programme Highlights
The experience offered by my James Love Churchill Fellowship provided me with a rare opportunity to be able to immerse myself in the field of traditional picture frame making that is only being preserved by a small number of highly trained dedicated professionals. The level of training these individuals exhibited, some undergoing traditional apprenticeships in their chosen field, was extraordinary.
The National Gallery, London provided me with greatest insights, skills and knowledge into the world of traditional picture frame making rarely seen in Australia. Working with Peter Schade, Head of Framing and Isabella Kocum, Frame Conservator, I was provided the opportunity to learn from highly skilled trade professionals from various disciplines, such as carvers and gilders, who imparted what knowledge they could in the given time frame available to me.
My time at the Guildhall Art Gallery, offered me the opportunity to work with an outstanding Frame Conservator, Caroline Oliver. Although not traditionally trained as a carver or gilder Caroline’s knowledge and exposure to traditional picture framing techniques was an invaluable learning experience.

Working in these institutions for an extended period of time I was afforded the luxury to view the collections of these two Art Museums prior to opening hours and also gain access to their respective frame storage rooms, this provided an excellent opportunity to examine some of the picture frames in their collections at a much closer and detailed level.

I also had the opportunity to visit Gerry Alabone, Head Frame Conservator at TATE Britain. Zoe Allen, Head of Frames and Furniture Conservation at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and Hugh Antram, Tom Barrow and Yukiko Yoshii Frame Conservators at the National Maritime Museum. Conversations with these conservators revealed one similar factor in that they all had high levels of traditional picture frame making training, be it carving, gilding, the use of hand tools and wood machining.
I was fortunate in being able to attended lectures at the The Courtauld Institute of Art and The Art Workers’ Guild, which was only made possible through the contacts that I made during my Fellowship.
Major Conclusions and Recommendations
The role of traditional picture framing in the 21st century is unique, in that it is limited to a very small number of highly trained trade professionals, either employed in public institutions or working in private practice. These individuals are passionate about their profession and are maintaining skills and techniques that are hundreds of years old. The knowledge gained during my Churchill Fellowship will be invaluable at a local, state and national level if we are to maintain traditional picture frame making skills that are in rapid decline in Australia. As of 2016 the number of individuals, with varying skill levels and training, which can competently manufacture period picture frames using traditional materials and techniques in Australia is declining. This unique opportunity provided by my James Love Churchill Fellowship will enable me to contribute to the Australian visual arts community, public and private galleries/museums, secondary, tertiary and vocational education, and professionals in allied fields such as conservators, restorers, artists and picture framers. The traditional skills acquired are also transferable to the materials and techniques in contemporary art practice such as painting and sculpture. The applied knowledge gained covered aspects of complex traditional frame making, from frame design, surface preparation, ornamentation, gilding and patination.

Dissemination of Information
The dissemination of the knowledge and techniques gained during my Fellowship are necessary to preserve the declining skills base of this traditional profession that has a strong historical connection to the visual arts. The dissemination of the applied knowledge and research findings, through organizations such as Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials (AICCM), International Council Of Museums, Australia (ICOM Australia), Australia International Council On Monuments and Sites (Australia ICOMOS), National Trust of Australia, Picture Framing Guild of Australia, Secondary, Tertiary and Vocational education institutions, and also through Local, Regional and National Art Galleries and Museums, will be via lectures, seminars, publications and conferences papers, online and in print. Conducting professional development courses and mid-career training for practitioners with a grounding in traditional picture framing will provide an opportunity to expand on their current knowledge. At a vocational level the transference of these skills and knowledge via apprenticeships, mentoring and trainee programs will provide a practical grounding in the field of traditional picture framing.

The research component of the project will contribute to the existing pool of knowledge on the history of the 19th Century Australian picture framing industry, specifically the connection between Australia, Great Britain and Europe; with this research the intention is for a future publication on this subject that would prove an invaluable contribution to the history of Australian visual arts.

A recurring theme during my Fellowship was the lack of any definitive resources relating specifically to frame ornamentation nomenclature. The ongoing difficulty to accurately name or identify frame ornamentation was made very clear to me and requires further investigation and research. At the recent AICCM frame symposium, FRAME: Concept, History and Conservation, National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) Melbourne 2016, I chaired a discussion panel proposing this topic and the need to compile such a document. There was a unanimous agreement that such a resource would be invaluable to our profession. This is the very early stages of what will be a large undertaking, however with the assistance of other frame makers, restorers, conservators and architects, I believe such a publication will make an invaluable contribution to the visual arts.
PROGRAMME SUMMARY

LONDON

Hugh Antram, Frame Conservator
Tom Barrow, Frame Conservator
Yukiko Yoshii, Frame Conservator

TATE Britain, Millbank (15 February 2016)
Gerry Alabone, Frame Conservator

Guildhall Art Gallery, Guildhall Yard (22 February - 18 March 2016)
Caroline Oliver, Lead Conservator (Frames)

Victoria and Albert Museum, Cromwell Road (14 April 2016)
Zoe Allen, Frame Conservator

The National Gallery, Trafalgar Square (4 April – 6 May 2016)
Peter Schade, Head of Framing
Isabella Kocum, Frame Conservator
Keith Buddin - Framing Technician
Hazel Aitken - Pa to Director of Conservation; Framing Department Administrator

The Courtauld Institute of Art, Strand (21 January 2016)
Prof. Marco Fioravanti: GESAAF - University of Florence
Advances in Wood ID in Painted Cultural Heritage Objects: Invasive, Non-Invasive and Emerging Techniques

The Art Workers’ Guild, Bloomsbury (30 April 2016)
Brother Richard Kindersley
Letter Cutting – Fin de Siècle.
My visit to the frames department at the National Maritime Museum coincided with the exhibition ‘Samuel Pepys: Plague, Fire, Revolution.’ My limited knowledge of 17th century London was considerably expanded with this excellent exhibition. Hugh Antram, Tom Barrow and Yukiko Yoshii all qualified frame conservator who also had training in traditional picture frame making techniques, working in the frames conservation department of the National Maritime Museum. The duties undertaken by all staff in the frames department include, frame conservation and restoration, manufacture of period frames and preventive conservation. The studio consisted of two separate workrooms and an external courtyard where various species of specialist woods were housed; these were to be used in the manufacture of period frames.

The conservation studio is where all treatments, examinations and preparatory work are completed on existing frames and also serves as the gilding and finishing room for any replica frames, which are all made in-house. There is a dedicated woodworking room which houses the frames department woodworking machinery, used in the manufacture of replica frames and all associated wood machining that is required for preventive conservation. All aspects of frame making are performed in-house, from research, concept, design, and manufacture through to the specific applied finishing of the frame. The ability of being able to control all elements of the process provides greater flexibility and control over the entire process.
The TATE frames department was established in 1988 and specializes in all aspects of framing from historic research, conservation and restoration to making replica frames. I had initially intended to undertake a four-week placement in the TATE framing department, however due to unforeseen circumstances this was not possible in the allotted time frame. I did however meet with Gerry Alabone, Head of the TATE frame department and we discussed at length the work undertaken in the TATE’s conservation framing studio.

The approach to making replica frames at the TATE is slightly different to other framing departments I visited in that the wooden lengths of frame moulding were manufactured by the TATE’s carpenters and joiners who complete all wood machining duties; this is possibly due to space restrictions in the frames studio. This I found a little unusual, however this system appears to work very well for the TATE as the replica frames, which are produced in-house, are of exceptional quality. Once the machined lengths of mouldings are received all other aspects of period frame manufacture is undertaken in the frames studio, from the application of gesso, to the application of ornament through to gilding and toning. Due to the nature of the TATE Britain’s collection the majority of frames manufactured in-house are produced using traditional frame making techniques.
The one picture frame, in TATE Britain’s collection, which was of most significance to my 19th century frame research, surrounds the painting *Ophelia* by John Everett Millais. When I first saw this frame, some years ago, the shape of the frames profile and its ornamentation immediately struck me as being very similar to the frames made by the 19th century Melbourne frame maker Isaac Whitehead. Due to importance of the painting and also as it was on permanent display I was unable to examine the frame in any great detail. Fortunately I was able to photograph the frame and record its ornament and profile. A report compiled by the late John Anderson, frames conservator at the TATE, relating to the Millais frame held in the frame conservation files and also available online goes in to some detail about the frame, however there is no mention of the frame maker or the frames provenance.
The TATE website provides some insight into the frame by John Anderson, former TATE frame conservator.

‘The frame currently around Ophelia may not be original. The frame is decorated with moulded flowers such as daisies, wild roses, poppies and ivy. This frame may not be the frame the painting had when it was exhibited for the first time in 1852. An original frame would probably have been simpler in design, reflecting the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood’s interest in the medieval. The design uses flowers from the painting to decorate the near outer edge of the frame. The scrolling design used in the hollow (the curved part of the frame from the near outer edge towards the inner frame) can be linked to the painting with its Shakespearean theme. It is termed an “Elizabethan Ornament” in a groundbreaking design book, *The Grammar of Ornament*, published in 1856 by Owen Jones. It is because of the similarity of the hollow decoration to that in the book that a later date for the frame is suggested. The same design, although on a smaller scale, can be seen on a number of frames dating from the early 1860s, in the National Portrait Gallery, London. This book was extensively used and copied by designers from the moment of publication until the end of the century.’

(TATE Britain, 1999)
The publishing of Owen Jones *The Grammar of Ornament*, provided 19th century frame and compo manufacturers with new and exotic patterns that they employed to great effect. The influence of Orientalism is clearly visible in the compo ornament in the scotia, (hollow) of the frame on *Ophelia*, contrary to the statement by Anderson I do not believe the ornament used in the scotia to be Elizabethan, rather Arabian. As can been seen in the plates below the noticeable difference between the rigidity of the Elizabethan ornament and the fluidity of the Arabian ornament is very evident and much closer stylistically to the compo ornament of the frame.

Elizabethan ornament pp. 129-134

Arabian ornament pp. 55-60

(Digital Library for the Decorative Arts and Material Culture, 2015)
Of note is the National Gallery of Victoria’s online collection search for *Spring in the valley of the Mitta Mitta with the Bogong Ranges* 1866 Eugène von GUÉRARD. The information about the Isaac Whitehead frame is as follows:

‘A nearly identical but unlabeled frame appears on von Guérard’s *Mr Clark’s station, Deep Creek, near Keilor*, 1867 (A2-1986). Whitehead frames are often associated with von Guérard’s paintings but the style is not unique to Whitehead. Examples by Stevens (Melbourne) and Vokins (London) are generically similar in style and construction. The frame carries a label centre bottom and there is also an inscription, *Isaac Whitehead*, in pencil on the stretcher, right edge, which may indicate Whitehead was the supplier of the stretched canvas. The frame is well proportioned and the near central positioning of the torus gives the frame a balance, which differentiates it from more classical forms. The frieze pattern is seen on other frames by Whitehead. Among English frames which might serve as models for the type brought to Melbourne by Whitehead, we can look to the frame on *Ophelia* by John Everet Millais, in Tate Britain, thought to date from the end of the 1850s or early 1860s. This painting, and many others in the NGV collection, is in a frame made by Whitehead.’

Composition or Compo was a popular 19th century thermoplastic material consisting of a mix of protein-based glue, calcium carbonate, linseed oil and other ingredients that was used as a substitute to carved ornamentation. Having a putty-like consistence when heated, it was pressed into moulds, removed and then applied to the gessoed frame, and once cured it would harden ready for gilding. Frame makers advertising as carvers and/or gilders did not necessarily manufacture compo ornament in-house; instead buying pressed compo ornament from various specialist composition manufacturers such as, George Jackson & Sons, Bielefeld & Co and Frank Binning. The frame maker could select various compo ornaments from different manufacturers and create their own unique style of frame that we now attribute to a particular framer, such as a Whitehead frame. Another alternative was for frame makers to purchase lengths of moulding “in the white”. These mouldings, usually sold in 12-foot lengths, were gessoed, complete with composition ornament and ready to be gilt. Companies such as H. Morell and others offered this ever-increasing service to the framing industry from the mid 19th century.

Picture frames with very similar frame profile and ornamentation to the ones used by Isaac Whitehead that I and others have noted are held in the following institutions in England, Victoria and Albert Museum, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, and the National Portrait Gallery. Further examples of picture frames with similar profiles and ornament, which I noted in a 2013 visit to Italy, are in the collection of Miramare Castle, Trieste. This is of particular interest in that Miramare was built for Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Hapsburg and his wife Charlotte of Belgium in 1860. The commission to furnish and decorate the castle was undertaken by the local craftsman Franz Hofmann and his son, Julius. To this date I have been unable to study these particular frames in close detail, as photography is prohibited in the Miramare Castle.

Based on these observations the use of this particular style of picture frame was not limited to England and Australia but also, as described above, in Italy. Another example, which used similar composition ornament in the scotia was noted is on a 19th century American frame.

It is becoming evident that the picture frames attributed to the Melbourne frame maker Isaac Whitehead, with his use of arabesque composition ornaments and distinctive frame profiles, were not exclusively his. With further research the provenance of the origins of these high quality compo moldings and frame profiles may be revealed.

Based on this, the difficulty in attributing a particular frame style to a 19th century frame maker based on ornament and frame profile alone is exceedingly complicated given the vast number of different composition ornaments available and the way in which they were used. The frame makers labels, adhered to the verso of frames, provides an indication as to the individual or business that assembled and gilt the frame, however in some instances not the person or company that actually ran the profile or made the compo moulding.
The Guildhall Art Gallery collection dates back to 1670 when portraits of twenty-two fire judges were commissioned following the Great Fire of London in 1666. The Corporation of London's art collection grew from this initial commission and now numbers approximately 4,500 works of art, through bequests, donations and acquisitions. Other historic buildings within the jurisdiction of the Guildhall Art Gallery in the City of London, with significant art collections, are the Old Bailey and Mansion House, which houses the Harold Samuel Collection one of the finest collections of Dutch and Flemish 17th century paintings in Britain.
Traditional picture frame making techniques and, the research and documentation of 19th century picture frames

The conservation department at the Guildhall consists of a part-time Senior Conservator (paintings), a part-time Lead Conservator (frames) and a part-time Conservator (paintings). Since 2007 the conservation department offers a 6-month conservation internship, alternating each year between paintings and frames conservation, for the professional development of recently graduated conservators, this internship programme is an excellent platform for the dissemination of knowledge in these fields.

Due to the exhibition schedule the two main projects undertaken in the Guildhall Art Gallery frames conservation studio was divided between constructing 4 frames for newly acquired photographs by the artist Polly Braden and undertaking the conservation treatment of the frame on Thomas Hope McLachlan *The Isles of the Sea* for the exhibition Victorians Decoded: Art and Telegraphy. Although not directly related to traditional picture framing techniques and methods, the processes used during these two projects involved elements relating to traditional frame making methods. Caroline Oliver, Lead Conservator (Frames), has a vast knowledge of traditional methods and techniques, which she kindly shared with me during my time at the Guildhall.

It is the responsibility of the Guildhall Art Gallery conservation department to inspect, re-hang and monitor the paintings at the Old Bailey and Mansion House, I was fortunate to be able to assist with these tasks, permitting me access into areas of these historic buildings rarely seen by the public.

The painting by John Constable, *Salisbury Cathedral, Wiltshire, from the Meadows*, (1831) in the Guildhall Art Gallery collection was requested for loan by The Lightbox gallery and museum located in Woking, Surrey for their exhibition John Constable - Observing the Weather. (The Lightbox, 2015)

I was entrusted with accompanying the painting to the Lightbox gallery and to supervise its installation. This unique opportunity to travel with such an important and valuable work of art and entrusted with its safe placement on the wall of the gallery was another highlight of my time at the Guildhall.
I assisted Caroline Oliver in preparing *La Ghirlandata*, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti for loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum for their exhibition Botticelli Reimagined. The frame required to be fitted with museum glass, a non-reflective, UV filtering laminated glass.

Four photographs, *Paternoster Square 2006, London Wall 2010, G20 2009* and *London Metal Exchange 2012*, were acquired by the Guildhall Art Gallery from Polly Braden’s photographic essay, *London’s Square Mile*, which documents the Financial District of London. (Polly Braden, 2014) The construction of the four frames for the display of the newly acquired photographs was relatively straightforward. The lengths of raw frame moulding made from oak, which were specified by the artist, were purchased from a local London picture frame-moulding supplier, and the mounting of the photographs was outsourced to an external conservation framer who prepared the photographs for framing again to the artist specifications. The lengths of mouldings were cut to size, assembled and finished in clear shellac. All photographs were then fitted into their frames, which were glazed with laminated museum grade glass.

The conservation of the frame for Thomas Hope McLachlan *The Isles of the Sea*, was a difficult undertaking in that it no longer retained its original finish having been over painted in bronze paint in a previous restoration. Initial tests revealed that there were significant areas of original gilding under the
bronze paint, which I removed using two different gels, for different areas of the frame. Areas of loose and lifting gesso and compo were consolidated with a protein-based adhesive. Small losses to the compo ornament were recast and replaced and losses to the gesso were filled. Again due to time constraints I was unable to complete the treatment and at the time of writing my report Caroline Oliver is finishing the project.

Caroline imparted several traditional gilding and frame-making techniques and formulas that she had acquired over her career, from using gin in her gilding liquor; a certain home-brand from one of England’s supermarket chains was preferred. The compo recipe that Caroline used was slightly different to the recipes that I had been using, as was the material that was used to take the impressions from existing frame compo ornament. Ratios of the protein based glue used in the preparation of gesso and bole was not dissimilar to what I have been using, however it was interesting to note similar results in finish with altered ratios. Although the frames studio was equipped with basic woodworking machinery, most frame profiles were out-sourced to external contractors to manufacture. All other work is undertaken in the frame studio from the application of gesso, bole and compo through to the gilding and toning.
Victoria and Albert Museum, Cromwell Road (14 April 2016)

My visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum frames conservation department coincided with their major exhibition Botticelli Reimagined. (V&A, 2015 Botticelli Reimagined)

As noted above, during my time at the Guildhall Art Gallery I assisted in the loan preparation La Ghirlandata, by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, this painting was featured as one of the highlights in Botticelli Reimagined it was a wonderful addition to an outstanding exhibition.

It was fitting that I visited the frames and furniture conservation department at the V&A as my Queensland Art Gallery predecessor, Paul Curson, had undertaken a 6-month internship, between 1988-89, under the tutorage of the resident gilding conservator Malcolm Green.

I spent two hours with Zoe Allen, Senior Gilded Furniture and Frames Conservator, in which we discussed many aspects of traditional gilding techniques and methods, preventive conservation approaches and emerging technologies that may have applications in picture frame conservation and frame manufacture.

As I stated previously 3D scanning and printing is a technology that I believe will have possible applications specifically in the conservation of picture frames. As for its use in the manufacture of frames, that is a topic best left for another research paper.
For some time now I have envisaged the use of 3D scanning and printing and how it may be used in frame conservation. I was familiar with Zoe Allen’s use of 3D printing as described on the V&A website blog, *The Conservation of Marie Antoinette’s Chair*. (V&A, 2015. *The Conservation of Marie Antoinette’s Chair*)

During the conservation treatment of this chair Zoe used 3D scanning and printing technology to replace a missing element of carved ornament on the crest of the chair. As I have no experience in the field of 3D scanning and printing I was very interested to discuss the outcomes of the use of this technique and its possible applications in the future. The results achieved with manufacturing the missing ornament through the use of 3D scanning and printing as described by Zoe were considered to be successful. Further research is to be undertaken in this field and I believe with the refinement of and with greater accessibility to these technologies, 3D scanning and printing will prove to be a vital instrument in the field of picture frame conservation.
The five weeks I spent with the staff of the frame department at the National Gallery was primarily focused on traditional picture frame techniques. I was fortunate to be able to assist with the reframing of *The Raising of Lazarus*, circa 1517-19, by Sebastiano del Piombo. The scope of the project was to replace the paintings existing architectural cassetta frame, which is not original to the painting, with a historically accurate period Italian Renaissance aedicular altar frame.

‘The architectural, sometimes freestanding type of picture frame that evolved in Italy in the 14th century and was used in the Renaissance for altarpieces and devotional images. In structure it drew on both classical and ecclesiastical architecture and reflected regional styles.’ (Oxford Reference, 2016)
Originally painted as an altarpiece *The Raising of Lazarus* was commissioned by Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici towards the end of 1516. Through correspondence from Sebastiano and others at the time, we know the artist was involved with the aedicular altar frame design. An 18th century copy of *The Raising of Lazarus* by Charles André van Loo currently resides in Narbonne Cathedral, France. Miraculously the original 16th century predella, lower section, of the original altarpiece was retained and incorporated into the 18th century altarpiece. This evidence was the basis for Peter Schade’s proposal to recreate the entire altarpiece, based on this original predella at Narbonne Cathedral.
Although I was not involved in the research and proposal stages of this project, the objectives that drive the rationale when reframing paintings in a public collection are based on thorough research, historical evidence and an understanding of the relationship between painting and frame. Architectural cassetta frames were in use in Italy from the mid-16th century to mid-17th century, placing them in a slightly later period than the painting by Sebastiano. As *The Raising of Lazarus* was completed circa 1517-19 the style of frame used on altarpieces and devotional paintings, such as *The Raising of Lazarus*, during this period was the aedicular frame; therefore the decision to employ this type of frame is in keeping with the historical framing conventions of the early 16th century altarpieces.

As with other projects at the National Gallery, Peter Schade, Head of Framing, has been able to source period frames from across Europe, which have been employed in the reframing of paintings in the Nation Galleries collection. A circa 16th century entablature with very similar carved ornaments, gilding and colour scheme to the original Narbonne Cathedral predella was obtained by Peter to be used on this project. My role in this project was to assist with the modification of the entablature, which required to be lengthened due to the size of the painting, which is close to 4 meters in height by 3 meters in width.

Prior to my commencement at the National Gallery, Peter had worked out the logistics and the modifications that were required to the entablature to securely accommodate the painting and the way in which the new additions were to merge with the existing carved ornament and overall appearance of the frame. The initial task was to increase the length of the entablature by just under two meters, to achieve this, the entablature was cut in half at an angle of around 45 degrees; this work was undertaken prior to my commencement at the National Gallery. My duties were to make the new elements; cornice, frieze and architrave, based on the original carved ornaments and mouldings.

As indicated in the image below an entablature consists of three main components, the cornice, the frieze and the architrave. The frieze of the 16th century entablature consisted of two edge jointed boards, onto which all other elements such as the carving and moulding were attached. The fixing method of all these elements was with handmade nails, there was no evidence that adhesives were used in construction of the entablature.

![Entablature Diagram](image-source)
Poplar, *Populus nigra*, was the most commonly used wood in 16th century Italy due to its availability and working properties, it has little blunting effect on tools, carves well (tools require to be exceptionally sharp), nailing and gluing is easy and its surface will take paint, varnish and polish satisfactorily. As the original entablature was made of poplar all new elements were also to be made of the same wood. Slabs of locally grown poplar were sourced for this project; using woodworking machinery the slabs were sawn and planed into the required dimensions for the elements that were to be added, all proceeding work was carried out with the use hand tools.
The two new poplar boards that were added to increase the length of the frieze required fitting and planning to conform to the cupping and bowing of the existing poplar boards. Never having worked with poplar before it became evident why this was such a commonly used wood.
The profiles required for the moulded elements were manufactured with the use of 19th century moulding planes. Once the lengths of wood were shaped to the corresponding profiles they then required further fitting to conform to the existing profiles.

(Zilli, 2015)

(Zilli, 2015)
Once satisfied that the moulded components corresponded to the existing profiles, the carving stage of the project could commence. The pattern of the ornament to be carved was transferred from the original to the newly moulded sections of wood. Due to assisting with other projects I was only able to complete the carving of the pearl and barrel ornament and the dentils.

(Zilli, 2015)
Peter continued carving the reaming ornament with the assistance of Francois Loudwig. Francois is a freelance woodcarver specializes in picture frame carving based in London, he undertook a traditional apprenticeship in woodcarving and sculpture in France.

I recently received an email from Peter Schade that included two images of the progress made on the frame since I left. In the image below the capitals, which will be supported by carved columns, are nearly completed.
The second image gives an idea of the scale of the painting and its frame, the progress of the work can be seen by the completed capitals which have been gilt and toned. The carving on the columns is completed and the next stage will involve the application of gesso, then bole followed by gilding and toning.

Francois Loudwig with carved columns
(Schade, 2015)
Alternating between working on the entablature I also worked closely with Isabella Kocum, Frame Conservator. Isabella undertook a gilding apprenticeship in the workshop of K. Wydler in Bern and completed a 3 years Diploma at the Kunstgewerbeschule, school of arts and crafts, in Bern.

My time spent with Isabella was invaluable in gaining further skills and insights into gilding, compo making and the nuances of toning and patination. The preparation of French compo was of particular interest to me, as I had no previous knowledge of this particular type of compo. Historically the tendency to not disseminate knowledge by various workshops has proved nothing more than a major hindrance in attempts to retain traditional techniques and practices. Recipes for picture framers compo is a perfect example of this, historically it has been closely guarded and rarely passed on, fortunately through people like Isabella these methods will not be lost.
Isabella shared her extensive knowledge and experience, which I was very appreciative. I was able to observe and document numerous techniques in particular variations of gesso and bole preparation, water gilding, patination and the preparation of French compo. Isabella demonstrated how to prepared the compo; I then selected an exquisite 19th century copper mould from the National Gallery frame department’s collection, to use with the compo that Isabella had made. The resulting impressions were of exceptional quality, I was very impressed with the results and the sharpness of detail that was achieved.
I attend this lecture as I have strong interest in the field of wood identification. As the substrate of picture frames are traditionally manufactured from wood I believe it is vitally important to able to correctly identify and name, using the appropriate binomial nomenclature, the different species of woods used in picture frame manufacture. Correct identification is an invaluable tool in the documentation and conservation of historical frames and also when determining what species of wood to employ when constructing period replica frames.

‘The Courtauld Institute of Art is the world’s leading centre for the study of the history and conservation of art and architecture. Through its unique integration of activities, facilities and resources, The Courtauld provides an exceptional environment for research, learning and professional development.’ (The Courtauld Institute of Art, About. 2016)

‘Professor Marco Fioravanti has carried out his research activity within the field of Wood Science and Technology with special interest on Wood Anatomy, effects of silvicultural practices on wood quality, woodworking and timber processing, wood mechanic and micro-mechanic, time dependent behavior of wood, conservation of wooden cultural heritage.’ (Università degli Studi di Firenze, 2016)

The lecture commenced with tree biology, the naming and classification of woods, the different structure of softwoods and hardwoods and the importance of knowing the difference between transverse, radial and tangential sections when taking samples for examination. It was made very clear and could not be stressed enough that it was fundamentally paramount to study and understand these aspects of wood anatomy if one is to be able to successfully identify wood correctly. *Wood ageing*, was explained as a complex phenomenon in which the permanent modification that wood undergoes over time as the consequence of interaction of many different features, must also be taken into account when identifying wood.
Fioravanti then proceeded to give an overview the three different approaches to wood identification.

Invasive; this is used when it is possible to take small samples of wood from the object being investigated; these samples can then be viewed at various magnifications depending the available equipment one has access to, from very basic hand lenses to microscopes through to scanning electron microscopy. What Professor Fioravanti could not emphasize enough was the correct orientation of the sample; this is vital for an accurate identification reading.

Non-Invasive; the techniques discussed involved the use of X-ray computed tomography “CT scanning” and Microtomography, Micro computed tomography or "micro-CT" these methods are employed when taking samples from object is impossible due to their cultural significance or to the physical nature of the object, such as a musical instrument or painted object, where damage may occur in taking a sample.

Emerging Techniques; Fioravanti detailed the use of Fourier Transform Infrared spectroscopy (FTIR), Fourier Transform Near Infrared Spectrometers (FT-NIR) and Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR) as alternative methods of wood identification. Currently these technologies are restricted to high end scientific research and not readily accessible.
The Art Workers' Guild, 6 Queen Square, Bloomsbury, (30 April 2016)

Brother Isabella Kocum, frames conservator at the National Gallery and member of the Art Workers Guild, invited me to this lecture presented by Brother Richard Kindersley.

As stated on The Art Workers’ Guild website:
‘The Art Workers’ Guild is a body of more than 350 artists, craftspeople and architects working at the highest levels of excellence in their professions. We represent over 60 creative disciplines. Members meet every other Thursday for lectures given by guest speakers on subjects related to the Guild’s interests: the promotion of craftsmanship and excellence in the applied arts. We also arrange exhibitions, discussions and demonstrations, to bring our expertise and experience to other communities.’ (The Art Workers’ Guild, 2016)

‘Richard Kindersley studied lettering and sculpture at Cambridge School of Art and in his Father’s workshop. In 1970 he set up his own studio in London, accepting commissions for lettering and sculpture. Among his sculpture commissions are works for Exeter University, British Telecom, Sainsbury’s, Lloyds Register of Shipping, Flaxyards, Christies’ Fine Art and Night and Day Grosvenor Square London, Winner of 7 major brick carving competitions and awarded the Royal Society of Art, Art for Architecture Award.’ (Richard Kindersley Studio, 2016)

Letter Cutting – Fin de Siècle.
Cut in stone by artists, sculptors, and typeface designers, letter cutting is inscriptive architectural lettering, recognised for its beautiful calligraphy rather than the carved forms or symbols more closely associated with traditional stone carving. Although the lecture was in no way related to traditional picture framing the guild provided an insight in to how this organization provides a platform for people trained in traditional art forms have a forum in which to discuss their practice and how traditional skills can be retained.

The lecture presented by Richard Kindersley was a fascinating insight into the history of western letter cutting and the evolution of typeface from ancient Rome to the 21st century. Richard also talked about his practice and commissions he has personally undertaken throughout his career.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2003, the UNESCO General Conference passed the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The Convention is aimed at safeguarding the uses, representations, expressions, knowledge and techniques that communities, groups and, individuals, recognise as an integral part of their cultural heritage. The five proposed broad ‘domains’ in which intangible cultural heritage is manifested are:

- Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- Performing arts;
- Social practices, rituals and festive events;
- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- Traditional craftsmanship.


Traditional craftsmanship is perhaps the most tangible manifestation of intangible cultural heritage. However, the 2003 Convention is mainly concerned with the skills and knowledge involved in craftsmanship rather than the craft products themselves. Rather than focusing on preserving craft objects, safeguarding attempts should instead concentrate on encouraging artisans to continue to produce craft and to pass their skills and knowledge onto others, particularly within their own communities. (UNESCO, 2016. Traditional craftsmanship)

Traditional picture framing has been in decline the world over since the middle of the 20th century. In Malcolm Green’s 1991 essay, Thirty Years of Gilding Conservation at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Gilded Wood, Conservation and History, he laments the loss of traditional skills, materials and techniques;

‘Yet not all changes in the name of progress have been for the better. Some time-tested techniques have been lost or pushed aside, and some new materials and techniques do not outperform the older ones. It is easy to denigrate the past. Craftsmen of the caliber of my tutor, Albert W. Payne, resident gilding conservator at the V&A from 1929 to 1956, are rare today. The large workshops, such as he and his contemporaries trained in, have mostly disappeared. The dissolution of the apprentice system has made it difficult for a beginner to get adequate training and makes it imperative that conservators and restorers who work in museums share knowledge and experience, so that new generations can train to take our places in the future.’ (Green, M, 1988)

In the 25 years since the publishing of Green’s essay, the decline of traditional framing skills has continued. As mentioned there are only a handful of qualified traditional picture framers remaining in Australia and I believe that it is their duty and responsibility to pass on their knowledge and experience to retain these skills. Public art and museum institutions, which employ professionals trained in the field of traditional picture framing also, have the responsibility of disseminating this knowledge.

I am very fortunate that my place of employment, QAGOMA and other similar institutions both nationally and internationally, recognises the importance and value of retaining the traditional skills of the picture framer. Due to the nature of their historical collection of paintings, picture frames are an integral part of the display of these works of art. It is through these institutions, which actively support these highly skilled and trained professionals, that these skills are maintained to very high standards.
From the lived experience, enabled by my Churchill Fellowship, I have had the privilege of gaining further in-depth experience through the transfer of knowledge from highly trained professionals who have been more than willing to share their skills with me. The key to preserving these skills is through the engagement with professional bodies such as the AICCM, ICOM Australia, Australia ICOMOS, National Trust of Australia, Picture Framing Guild of Australia, and Secondary, Tertiary and Vocational education institutions. However of even more importance is the provision of career pathways and opportunities for young practitioners who want to pursue this profession.
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