acmi

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR THE MOVING IMAGE

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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CONTEXT

ACMI

The Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) is Australia's national museum of film, TV, videogames, digital culture and art. Distinct in the museum landscape in Australia, ACMI celebrates the moving image and its profound impact over the last 120 years as it transports, challenges and entertains people of all ages and backgrounds, right across the globe. ACMI holds a collection that encompasses art, film, television, videogames, ephemera, digital culture and social memory.

ACMI Collection

ACMI's collection represents 75 years of bringing together a fascinating aggregation of moving image legacy that encompasses a unique look at Victoria, Australia, and the world. As we rapidly evolve towards a knowledge economy, ACMI presents its stories and objects in unique ways, spanning the conventions of traditional museums and reflecting the innovation and evolution of the moving image in our fast-moving world.

The collection has been developed in distinct stages. As the State Film Centre of Victoria, the collection was developed as a film lending library, then as Cinemedia evolved classic and contemporary feature film titles were added. When ACMI was established in 2001, an exemplary collection of hundreds of single- and multi-channel works were added to the collection along with 200 videogames and numerous art commissions that furnished the building upon opening. Those numbers have changed significantly since 2001 - for example videogames now have grown to over 7000 - and Collections has been actively deaccessioning from the former lending collection. Currently the Collection numbers 250 000 items.

The Film Act has provided a mandate for SFC/ ACMI since 1946. Each age has presented different opportunities. Over the decades the organisation has interpreted, acted upon and leveraged each of these in different ways at different times. We are on the brink of such an organisational shift with the renewal of the permanent exhibition and changes in audience expectation; as such a new collection development strategy is warranted.

Collecting Environment

Collecting institutions do not operate in a vacuum. Museums and galleries rely on the support of each other in the loan of work and the sharing of conservation and preservation knowledge. No public institution can maintain a desire to create a universal reference collection. ACMI aims to be selective and representative, and in some cases "selectively representative", rather than comprehensive, using the collection to build public engagement around new or newly reconsidered forms of media. Working collegiately strengthens our ability to reveal to our audiences the widest possible range of moving image. Within the international collecting sector we have seen the notion of a distributed international network of collaboration develop as an emerging trend over the last decade. The trend encompasses two-and three-dimensional objects as well as the digital realm. It recognises that technology has enabled confederations of smaller, or boutique, collecting institutions with a common vision and purpose but different areas of significance to work together to create globally minded, connected collections where the gestalt is greater than the sum of its parts.

Institutional context

Access is the cornerstone of the collection unit. The work of collecting and preserving Australia's moving image and digital culture history is in order to provide the widest possible access to this material; and this work is urgent. The fragility of formats, rapid technological obsolescence and access to ageing practitioners determines that we must act decisively to ensure the long-term availability of this heritage. The magnitude of the undertaking requires ACMI to work collaboratively both nationally and internationally. Our partnerships with the NFSA, the Internet Archive, MoMA, the TATE, universities and private collectors as contributors to a distributed network of collections are vital. Into this ACMI brings considerable strengths as leaders in curation, presentation, short-term preservation and interpretation. We must be mindful of avoiding duplication of effort and recognise the limitations of finite resources; accordingly, the Guiding Principles below set out what ACMI will and won't undertake.

AIM OF STRATEGY

This collection development strategy sets the direction for collection development over the coming 5 years to support organisational aims. Its purpose is to provide a framework for endorsement of development guidelines and policies in line with our legal obligation under the Film Act and the organisation's vision and goals.

This strategy represents significant changes in the way the collection is integrated in to the whole ACMI offer and necessitates changes in collecting, preservation and display practices.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

While the collection needs flexibility in its strategy to respond to changes in the sector and community, it will use as focal points these key touchstones:

Universal access – actively pursue meaningful ways to increase the broadest possible access to the collection in accordance with ACMI's Cultural and Linguistic Diversity and Disability Action Plan priorities

A celebration of amateur, domestic, and the local – preserving and bringing to light a great collection of historical short films, social memory projects and student works that provide a window into life in the state of Victoria over many decades, whilst continuing to collect new media forms that reflect similar amateur, domestic and local concerns

An archive of time-based media artworks – we will continue to enrich our eclectic collection through the acquisition of works through our commissioning activities of new work and selectively backfilling where significant gaps are apparent. The most immediate work here is the conducting of a survey of the existing material with the curatorial team to establish a focus and plan for the future collecting of artworks

A contributor to global conservation of interactive media– As a repository and specialist in early Australian videogame and interactive media history through ARC partnerships and in close

collaboration with local makers and creators and peer institutions such as the National Film and Sound Archive and the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences

Address the historical gender and Eurocentric biases across our collecting fields – actively pursue works that wind back the historical bias towards male and white, settler voices

Privilege distinctive voices – collect work that captures distinctive or under-represented voices such as those of the Australian Indigenous and migrant communities

Access and preservation of existing First Nations material – develop relationships with First Nations people who are custodians of the material in ACMI collections to promote greater access to this material for First Nations people and develop appropriate processes for the care and safeguarding of this material.

As a corollary, ACMI does not intend to *collect*:

International works on film – except where they directly inform us of cultural or technological developments within Australia or are part of our art commissioning activities

Preservation material of feature films – these are rightly the purview of the NFSA

Preservation material of documentaries – these are rightly the purview of the NFSA

Preservation material of television – state, federal or commercially funded television productions, these are rightly the purview of the NFSA

MISSION, VISION and GOALS

ACMI's Mission: to enrich our lives and foster our creative industries by illuminating the moving images and technologies that define our age.

ACMI's Vision: a connected community of watchers, makers, and players, celebrating the wonder of the moving image.

Fostering relationships with creators and industry

- Working with artists, makers and creators to collect not only the artwork, videogames and objects but the materials that inform us about the creative process
- Support experimentation, production and distribution
- Strengthen our engagement with culturally diverse artists and audiences
- Champion the archive as a 'living archive' to artists, educationalists and researchers and promote re-use and diverse public engagement

Collaboration
- Use partnerships to reach beyond our building and access content held in other institutions
- Through energetic partnerships and increasing specialisation of the collection we will increasingly be seen as a valued member of the moving image archival world
- Build our reputation for powerful collaborations and partnerships in Australia and around the globe

- Embed a culture of experimentation that embraces risk, valuing iterative improvement, testing and learning
- Leverage and highlight our collection, and create links to the global network of moving image collections, to deliver a dynamic and accessible interface for our audiences to explore, share and remix their histories

Embedded experimentation and integration across ACMI offer
- The opening of the Media Preservation Lab in 2020 as a key ACMI offer will showcase the preservation work of the collection team. As we undertake the preservation of new media works (such as VR) we will demonstrate increasing levels of innovation and experimentation
- Working closely with the Governance team to licence collection material for the broadest possible use will provide new programming opportunities across the museum
- New licencing also opens up new opportunities to showcase the collection's depth in our social media offers
- Digital access ensures greater opportunity to harness the collection for exhibition and touring programming and cinema screenings
- Providing opportunity for artists-in-residence to produce new works from existing collection material

Discoverability, access and licensing
- Access MUST be the raison d'etre but we will continue to develop and explore new methods of discovery. At times, this will necessitate experimentation…and failure….
- Interpretation and exhibiting – working with other ACMI units to develop new ways to exhibit and interpret the collection
- In line with the Film Act access to the collection is a key strategic objective. Digitisation will remain a cornerstone of this objective for the next 5 years. ACMI is well positioned to take advantage of the libraries and archives provisions of the Copyright Act to provide digital access to both analogue and digital-born works, providing analogue originals from which digital copies are derived are kept. Working alongside the storage rationalisation work, funded by Creative Victoria, and building on the significance and rarity assessment, Collections staff will identify works to digitise. Re-assessment of the legal rights to this material will also be explored to facilitate taking collection content beyond the current, largely onsite, access parameters
- Over the past 5 years ACMI has developed a less adverse attitude towards risk in the use of material from the collection. Access is the raison d'etre for all activities and as such solutions to Copyright impediments to this must be found utilising exceptions in the Copyright Act as a public educational institution, and adopting a risk management approach to Copyright. We subscribe to the widespread acceptance that orphan works should be accessible and, where possible, we pursue a Creative Commons Zero licence for material held; most notably with the amateur works
- Active licence negotiations during acquisition to provide widest possible access must be a core activity of the Governance team in order to realise the widest benefits of an open and accessible collection

Preservation care and conservation
- Lead, share and learn the unique requirements of moving image preservation
- Time based media art acquisition presents a host of unique preservation and access challenges, it is our aim to collaboratively lead preservation efforts with artists and like-minded institutions
- Continued high-level digitisation outputs to preserve analogue carriers and create both master and access derivatives for both preservation and use
- Transition from predominantly digitisation to digital preservation of complex works over the next 5 years
- Invest, promote and experiment with digital preservation practices
- Innovative preventative conservation practices

SCOPE, CONTENT AND AREAS OF FOCUS

Art

ACMI has an extraordinarily albeit selective collection of time-based media artworks consisting of experimental film, single- and multi-channel works as well as complex software-based pieces. They represent a cross-section of national and international artists.

The selective commissioning and subsequent acquisition of mainly Australian time-based media and experimental artworks will continue to expand this important collection. New works, especially commissioned to furnish ACMI's renewal, will operate alongside commissioning for temporary exhibition.

To assist with the identification of works for inclusion the following guidelines can be applied:

- We reject the traditional categorisation of 'high' and 'low' culture and art - instead ACMI embraces practice from the niche to the mainstream, avant garde to popular culture across the moving image, showcasing exceptional talent from Melbourne, Australia and around the world
- Illuminating process is as important to us as presenting the final product. We enable things to be made by the industries we house, commission, collaborate and co-create with, and we make this visible – including enabling and showcasing preservation. Our curators will work with artists in order to help them develop a comfort level with revealing their process to future generations.
- Actively collect to redress gender and Eurocentric biases
- We value and promote the presentation and preservation of moving image art and content – both analogue and digital – so future generations can make meaning of the past as they interpret their present and create the future.

Videogames

Videogames are one of our new core focusses to be treated with the same care and rigour as our other disciplines. Melbourne is a centre of excellence for independent games creation and the games developed are of international significance. Collecting material relating to how games are made allows us to reveal the creative process and provide research material for academics, researchers and developers.

ACMI has always collected videogames, with significant holdings of Australian titles from the 1980s being accessioned and researched in great depth as part of the two funded "Play it again" Australian Research Council projects.

ACMI will continue to partner with peer institutions to collect, preserve and provide access to significant historic and contemporary Australian videogames, notably through the ARC partnership with Swinburne Institute of Technology, RMIT and close collaboration with local contemporary creators and peer institutions such as the NFSA and MAAS

Internationally, preservation of historic games is patchy at best and ACMI's work with current and previous ARC projects in this space demonstrates it has the capacity to be a world leader in this field. Furthermore, access to historic games is critical for the understanding of videogames as medium by the public and for the creation of future games.

Moving image works on film

ACMI holds an eclectic mix of historic moving image material on film – representative rather than comprehensive, primarily through the former lending collection of the State Film Centre. Active deaccessioning over the last 5 years has begun the work of streamlining the collection to reduce duplication and reflect contemporary access to these titles. This deaccessioning work will continue to further refine these holdings.

Alongside deaccessioning ACMI will selectively acquire new and historic material. We will enrich our unique catalogue of key film titles, selectively back-filling where significant gaps are apparent, and will similarly selectively acquire works applying new uses of technology that advance the use of the moving image to tell stories.

The generous support of the film industry by the Australian Government in the 1970s and 1980s created a proliferation of independent and experimental film production. Notable amongst this was the Experimental Film and Television Fund which ran from 1970 into the 1980s. Many of these ageing film-makers are now seeking a repository to lodge this material. ACMI has a significant collection of this material with some notable gaps. Effort should be made to locate and secure these works before deterioration of the analogue material renders them lost. ACMI has commenced this work in recent years working with notable artists such as Corinne and Arthur Cantrill, John Hughes, Ivan Gaal and others.

Home Movies and Amateur works

Home movies are both personal and cultural treasures. They record life through a unique lens, unencumbered by commercial or political imperatives. They are intimate portraits of everyday life and experiences carefully crafted through the eyepiece to empathise important moments and subjects. They sometimes inadvertently record landmarks long vanished or cultural ceremonies providing invaluable opportunities to researchers and social and architectural historians. Through the preservation and presentation of these diverse points of view ACMI facilitates the re-examination and re-interpretation of the past to help better inform the present and shape the future. By securing generous re-use licensing this material has been made available for artists, students and film-makers for incorporation into new creative works.

Future equivalents of these historical works will be found in born-digital media – from smartphone videos to interactive storytelling and private-press videogame equivalents. We will continue to explore and experiment with models for this highly fragile ephemeral contemporary historical amateur media.

Previously ACMI had undertaken this work under the banner of 'digital storytelling'. ACMI facilitated the production of thousands of community-based digital stories from 2002 to 2014. Consideration should be given to selectively acquiring digital personal stories being independently produced now that the facilities to make your own films is ubiquitous in a way that it wasn't 20 years ago. Web harvesting from sites like YouTube and community-based forums would be new business for ACMI and would require additional resources and might be best conducted in conjunction with the National Library of Australia and Internet Archive

Student works

ACMI has a long tradition of collecting and presenting the works of students. In the past these were films, however, student works of today are increasingly games and interactive works. ACMI should continue to work actively with educational institutions, predominantly tertiary institutions, to continue to represent material with such a deep point of connection to ACMI.

Cultural artefacts and objects

ACMI has never had a considered position on 3D industry and consumer objects such as TVs, projectors, consoles and the like. Their collection has been ad hoc, exhibition driven or as a result of an accompaniment to a film donation.

To determine what role ACMI should play in the national distributed collection of industry related artefacts, and how the current collection sits alongside those of other national institutions, it is necessary to understand what these other institutions currently hold and plan to collect. This is not

currently well understood, nor is the material clearly discoverable through online searches of relevant institutions.

The storage of objects presents significant challenges in both footprint required and conservation efforts. It is recommended that ACMI share its metadata on objects with national peer institutions and organise a summit with them to discuss the future of a co-ordinated and distributed collection and the role ACMI will contribute.

Until the rarity and significance of each item can be established through the above process it is further recommended that existing items be regarded as cultural artefacts, not props, and therefore be afforded a high conservation status. The current number of objects is approximately 300.

It should be noted that the renewal of ACMI's permanent exhibition has resulted in the acquisition of many objects for display. Many have been given the designation "prop" indicating that these are not to form part of the permanent collection and can be discarded once their exhibition need has been completed. Other items required for display that <u>may</u> develop some ongoing value as collection items have been given the designation "ACMI exhibition object"; this ensures they will be regularly monitored while on display and regular reviews undertaken to assess their status physically and culturally.

Ephemera

Ephemeral material such as posters, journals and books have never been part of the core collecting policies of ACMI or its previous incarnations. Offers of this material in the future should be directed to institutions in better position to provide long-term conservation of this material such as the state and national libraries and the NFSA. This should not be core business for ACMI except in exceptional circumstances.

MODES OF COLLECTING AND DEACCESSIONING

Commission and acquisition

The ACMI Renewal will bring a large number of objects acquired or commissioned for the permanent galleries into the collection. This, alongside renewed engagement with other ACMI units such as education, public programs and film programs, represents a more thorough integration of the Collection across the whole ACMI offer.

Additional to that influx, the focus of collection development in the next few years will be a refinement of the existing holdings rather than large-scale acquisition, though limited, focussed acquisition will continue.

ACMI's primary method of time-based media artwork acquisition will be through its vigorous commissioning partnerships which has already seen the inclusion into the collection of works such as "Mother Courage" by Warwick Thornton, "The Calling" by Angelica Mesiti and "Terror Nullius" by Soda_Jerk to mention but a few. All art commissions will become part of the ACMI collection.

Donation

Offers of donation are the primary way in which we acquire home movies, amateur productions and those of independent producers. Donations are often a combination of objects and moving image components especially in the case of home movie collections. Objects may be declined where they do not demonstrate rare or significant technical developments within their time period or are already well represented within the collection. Given limited object conservation resources these may also be offered to institutions better equipped for their long-term care. Where moving image material is accepted it must meet a minimum standard – relevant to this strategy, focused, well exposed and photographed. Material filmed overseas may be returned to the donor.

Donations of 2D ephemera will, in the first instance, be offered to libraries and the NFSA for possible inclusion in their collections.

Collaboration

ACMI has partnered, and continues to partner, with key tertiary institutions on research projects on Australian videogame and time-based media art history. Over the next 3 years a considerable amount of new material will be accessioned into the collection as part of these collaborations. Further collaborations with peer institutions, with particular focus on Indigenous makers and creators should be pursued to strengthen these areas of the collection which lack a contemporary presence.

ACMI is also actively working with private art collectors to showcase these collections and explore support for long-term preservation strategies for complex artworks. In some instances, this may lead to material entering the ACMI collection as either short-term loans or long-term deposits.

Cultural Gifts

ACMI should exploit the opportunities presented to acquire works through the Taxation Office's Cultural Gifts Program whereby an artist provides a tax benefit for the donation of work. ACMI has not regularly used this program although a work was acquired via this method from Baden Pailthorpe in 2018. To this end, a budget allocation has been made in 2019-2020 to assist donors with the valuations of material being offered through this scheme. A notable collection currently being negotiated under this scheme is the moving image archive of performance artist Stelarc.

Deaccessioning

Deaccession and storage rationalisation will be principle activities. Preliminary condition reporting shows much of the 16mm film collection is suffering deterioration. Using the acquisition and deaccession criteria contained within the policies the collection will be refined and rationalised. Deaccessioning will also relieve storage pressures and allow the movement of assets into more appropriate storage.

ACMI does not subscribe to the presumption of permanence for its collection material. In accordance with the development strategy, organisational aims and acquisition policy from time to time material will be considered surplus to requirements. The Deaccession Policy details the rationale and criteria for such review.

Following the significance and rarity assessment work done previously Collections staff have identified material for immediate deaccessioning and disposal. These include:

- Damaged material – Predominantly tapes and discs; this material is damaged beyond repair and has been awaiting deaccessioning and disposal for some years.

- Material outside the scope of the Strategic Principles – a thorough examination of this material took place in the year 2015-2016

ACMI will continue to actively deaccession, principally from the former lending collection, in order to better focus the collection around core organisational objectives but also to alleviate storage pressures.

GUIDING DOCUMENTS

- Creative vision statement
- Videogames at ACMI Manifesto
- Reconciliation Action Plan
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