BENJAMIN THOMAS
Caught on film: The story of Melbourne's original visual archive

Abstract
The University of Melbourne's Fine Arts slide library, now held within the collections of the Elisabeth Murdoch Library, is the earliest and one of the most significant collections of its kind in Australia. It owes its founding to the introduction of the discipline of art history at a tertiary level at the University in 1947 through the newly created Department of Fine Arts. So central was it to the teaching of art history that the inaugural *Herald* Chair of Fine Arts, Professor Joseph Burke, had already begun to assemble the library prior to leaving England. It is a unique collection, one that has been at the very core of art historical teaching and research in Melbourne for more than half a century, and it and its history are thus of major significance in the history of art education in Melbourne. This article presents the history of the establishment of the collection.

Introduction

Around the world, the primary visual database of the twentieth century – the slide library – is being replaced as academic libraries of slides are being digitised. Indeed, it has been more than a decade since a participant at a conference in Vancouver in Canada in 1996 noted that 'most universities are digitizing their slide collections'.[1] At The University of Melbourne in 2008, we are already straddling that technological bridge, with this process currently underway in the former Department of Fine Arts slide library, now held in the School of Culture & Communication.

There is a mounting body of international literature concerning the digitisation of slide libraries. Yet there is virtually nothing written on the origins on such collections, or their primary role in art education for much of the latter half of the twentieth century.[2] Set within this niche, this article offers a chronological history and context to Melbourne's original visual archive in the Department of Fine Arts' slide library.

The establishment of the Department of Fine Arts and its accompanying slide library in the late 1940s are aspects of a broader period of frenetic activity in Melbourne's art scene. Dr Ursula Hoff, writing in 1983 after a long and distinguished career with the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), and likewise with the teaching of art history at the University, saw one man in particular as central to these events. She declared, "The lively upturn in art events in Melbourne after World War II is to me inextricably interwoven with memories of the charismatic figure of Sir Daryl Lindsay."[3]

She, of course, had reason to think fondly of Lindsay for he had appointed her to the Gallery staff the year following his appointment as director in March 1942. His addition of Hoff to the meagre staff of the NGV at the time marked the first appointment of an academically educated art historian to an Australian art institution. It was a precursor to Lindsay's commitment to furthering scholarship in Australian art historical study, of which the later slide library would play such a fundamental role.

His determination to engage the Victorian public with the riches of the Gallery's collections, and more broadly with art itself, remains one of his great and lasting legacies. Under his directorship the Gallery began to publish the *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Gallery of Victoria*, continued today as the *Art Bulletin of Victoria* (or *ABV*), and in 1948 the National Gallery Society was formed. Both the journal and the society remain cornerstones of the NGV's outreach into the

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[1] Gross, Do, 1996, p. 1.
[2] Walsh, 2002.
[3] Hoff, 1983, p. 5.

community. Even prior to his directorship, as keeper of the prints in 1940, Lindsay advocated a scheme that would see the expansion of a loan collection of coloured prints rotated throughout regional secondary schools. 'If such a scheme could be put into operation, it would bring pictures and art generally, before those children of the community who are most in need of it – the children of the country state schools'.[4]

It comes as little surprise then to find the proposal to establish the tertiary teaching of art history in Australia owes much to the vision of Lindsay; a vision shared and supported financially by his close friend, chairman of the Gallery's trustees, and president of the *Herald & Weekly Times*, Sir Keith Murdoch.

Founding a Department of Art History

The lack of art education in Australia had been a long-standing lament of Lindsay's since the mid-1920s. When he succeeded James S. MacDonald as director of the NGV, he inherited an institution bereft of the scholarly trained staff required for the running of a major state institution; hence his appointment of Hoff to the Gallery's staff the following year.

As war-time restrictions eased in the final years of the Second World War – allowing for renewed consideration of the Gallery's post-war redevelopment – attention was given to the possibility of fostering 'home-grown' art scholars. Over dinner one evening with Murdoch and John Medley, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Lindsay reiterated the lack of suitable training in Australia for museum and gallery staff. He had in mind something akin to the Barber Institute of Fine Arts in Birmingham that had opened only a few years earlier in 1939 with the specific purpose of educating art scholars. 'Melbourne', Lindsay proposed, 'with the vast resources of the Gallery and the Felton Bequest was the ideal place [in Australia] for training'.[5] Murdoch agreed and subsequently pledged £40,000 on behalf of the *Herald & Weekly Times* for the establishment of the *Herald* Chair of Fine Arts at the University.[6]

Lindsay's selected as the inaugural *Herald* Chair the thirty-two year old Joseph Burke, who was then acting as private secretary to British Prime Minister Clement Attlee. His selection proved, as had his appointment of Hoff, to be an astute decision. As Hoff herself would later remark, Lindsay reaped the harvest of the Department's first students, 'thus taking precedence over all other Australian galleries.'[7]

Establishing the Fine Art slide collection

Before his arrival in Australia in December 1946, the inaugural *Herald* Chair, Joseph Burke, anticipated the lack of suitable materials and visual aids with which to commence the teaching of art history. He had raised such concerns with Lindsay in mid-August 1946, prompting Lindsay to make enquiries with Professor Browne of The University of Melbourne's Department of Education. Brown advised that while the University typically used 3 ¼ x 3 ¼ inch slides, as opposed to the standard American or German slide size of 3 ¼ x 4 inch, the larger size slides could be adapted for use with most Australian lantern slide projectors by means of a special wooden carrier.[8]

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[4] MacDonald, 1940, np.
[5] Lindsay, 1965, p. 149.
[6] ibid
[7] Hoff, 1983, p. 5.
[8] Lindsay, 1946a, np.

Yet even making these sorts of allowances, it was clear from the outset that such visual aids would have to be acquired internationally. The NGV had 'no slides at all and very little reference material except books', Lindsay informed Burke, 'So go ahead and get all the slides you can as there is a dearth of this sort of thing here.'[9] Lindsay suggested that a founding set of slides ought to cover subjects from the twelfth century to the 1940s, and, in keeping with the expressed aims of the Department's scope, represent all forms of the fine arts; 'pictures, sculptures, furniture, pottery, porcelain, etc.'.[10] Such a set, he proposed, might be able to be purchased through the Courtauld Institute of Art before Burke left London, via America, for Australia.

> As I presume you know their slide library it would be a good thing if you could make a selection of say twenty to thirty sets – and get them on order if they are not in stock – or failing this ask them to send me particulars of what can be got and prices. They could be purchased by the Gallery but you could always have the use of them for the University.[11]

Burke wrote further on the subject in September, having 'not realised there were so few slides in the Gallery's collection to draw on.'[12] He had visited the Courtauld, but found that the process of making an appropriate selection from the institution's vast collection of some 60,000 slides was 'not an easy one'.[13]

The Courtauld Institute of Art houses one of the world's largest collections of visual material relating to art history. It was founded in London in 1932 where its first lecturers were English Fine Arts experts. However the removal of the Warburg Institute from Hamburg to London in 1933, amidst growing political unease in Germany, saw an influx of European art historians working in Britain, among them twenty-four year old Ursula Hoff. The addition of a library of reproductions from one of the Courtauld's founders, Sir Robert Witt, in 1944 enriched the Institution's holdings enormously. Witt had been tirelessly energetic in the collating and cataloguing of his collection for decades. In 1925, only five years after his first catalogue had been published, a supplementary volume reflected the staggering addition of a further 100,000 reproductions bringing the collection's total holdings to some 250,000 images, representing 13,000 artists. Witt's library continued to be added to following his death in 1952, and by the late 1970s held more than 1,200,000 reproductions.[14]

The Courtauld could produce slides from this vast resource that reflected the library's strength of representing European artists from 1200 through until the 1850s. T.S.R. Boase, director of the Courtauld, suggested a 'standard set of 500-1000', which Burke felt advisable to procure 'to start off with'.[15] However, Burke continued by noting that what was 'urgently needed for teaching in the University' was a more comprehensive series of 5,000-6,000 slides.[16] These, Burke proposed, would mirror the main teaching areas of the Bachelor of Arts degree in Fine Arts as taught in London, and included:

> History of Art in the Renaissance
>   c 1300 – c 1600
> History of Art in England
>   a)   up to c 1550

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[9] ibid
[10] ibid
[11] ibid
[12] Burke, 1946, np.
[13] ibid
[14] Witt, 1978, np.
[15] Burke, 1946, np.
[16] ibid

b) from c 1550 onwards
Special periods: -
a) Byzantine c 400 – c 1400
b) Carolingian and Romanesque, c. 800 – c 1200
c) Gothic c 1100 – c 1500
d) Seventeenth Century
e) Eighteenth Century
f) Nineteenth Century to present day[17]

Thus, from its inception, the model on which tertiary art history in Australia would be taught was a British one. This had always been the case as far as secondary school teaching was concerned. When he first arrived in Australia Burke had been 'struck by the remarkable influence of the Royal College of Art in South Kensington, as it was before the period of its first reform under Sir William Rothenstein'. But where the original institution had progressed in terms of its approach to art education, Australia's art teachers – either trained or heavily influenced by South Kensington's practices – had remained firmly fixed to the now dated principles. As Burke argued, 'It is the first duty of the art teacher to combat these narrowing misconceptions implanted by a radically false method of teaching.'[18]

Moreover, it is interesting to observe how the joint resources of the NGV collections and the themes of Burke's choice of slides would inform the research of some of the Department's earliest students. For many of them the collection represented the most comprehensive and accessible body of visual material on European art making it an integral resource for research.[19] This remains one of the collection's core strengths more than fifty years on.

While the NGV aimed to establish a slide collection for its own use, and did so in 1949, from the outset it was felt that, where possible, duplication should be avoided between the two institutions.[20] The two collections would grow independently of one another, but within a few years of the Department's founding, arrangements were made for the periodic exchange of slides between institutions as required; a reflection of the close relationship envisaged and shared between the NGV and the Department during its early years.[21]

For a time, Burke even considered that the University's collection might initially be housed at the Gallery, due to a shortage of suitable space at the University. Indeed, Lindsay, on behalf of the NGV, had offered to cover half the costs of obtaining the collection. But in discussion with the University's Vice-Chancellor John Medley, they resolved that it was better for the University to purchase the initial selection outright. Burke was adamant on this point: 'Ultimately however the University ought to have its own collection.'[22] Additions to the collection could be finalised once Burke had arrived in Australia and familiarised himself with the new position. As Lindsay explained to him, "When you come out we can go into the matter of a further selection and I will get our people to purchase them and in this way we can build up a good library for the use of both places."[23]

Burke's views were strongly shared by the University's Vice-Chancellor John Medley. Replying to Burke on the 18th September 1946, Medley assured him that his own stance was 'quite definite'.

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[17] ibid
[18] Burke, 1958, pp. 2-3.
[19] See for example: Manion, 1962; Gaston, 1966; Gregory, 1978.
[20] Hoff, 1950, np.
[21] Lindsay, 1950, np.
[22] Burke, 1946, np.
[23] Lindsay, 1946b, np.

"It is obvious that we must provide you with adequate material to do your work, and the slides to which you refer are clearly absolutely necessary."[24]

Both Lindsay and Medley concurred with Burke's proposed purchase of slides that would form, as Medley described it, 'a nucleus for the department' in terms of teaching aids.[25] Burke was authorised by the University to spend up to £400 sterling on the acquisition of slides from either the Courtauld, or from other sources that he deemed appropriate.[26] It was a substantial amount; one placed in perspective when considered against Walter Sickert's *The Raising of Lazarus* which the NGV acquired a year later for to £650 sterling.[27] The resulting collection of slides brought to Melbourne in the late 1940s founded what has become a central component to fine art teaching at the University of Melbourne, as Burke intended.

Use and function of the slide collection in the field of Art History

The founding of the Fine Arts slide library in the late 1940s can be situated within a circle of increasing awareness by The University of Melbourne of the importance of generating and employing visual aids in education. Among the earliest initiatives that illustrate this trend was the transferral of the Royal Australian Air Force's (RAAF) Audio-Visual Aids Centre, under the directorship of Squadron-Leader Newman Rosenthal, to the University in 1944. By 1957, the Centre, now referred to as the Visual Aids Department, had its own building, and in 1968 was merged with the Education Research Office to form the Centre for the Study of Higher Education.[28]

Newman Hirsch Rosenthal, a former editor of the *Australian Jewish Herald*, had a long and distinguished career in the area of visual aids. During the war he collaborated with the Directorate of Training RAAF Head Quarters at Albert Park, Melbourne, to produce short promotional films.[29] Subsequently at The University of Melbourne, the Visual Aids Department was drawn upon consistently by the early Department of Fine Arts, as well as the National Gallery of Victoria in the documenting and conservation of works of art in their collection.

In March 1950, Lindsay reported to his trustees that the NGV's own collection of slides now consisted of 317 slides, and was increasing. Already, 910 existing works had been photographed and all new acquisitions were being photographed upon arrival. For this service, the Gallery was indebted to the University's Visual Aids Department who were responsible for the creation of the Gallery's slides. As Lindsay reminded his trustees, 'our thanks are due to the Visual Aids Department of the University which has always been most helpful in the making of slides at short notice.'[30]

The use of visual aids was steadily being incorporated into the fledgling area of scientific art conservation. Again, the close relationship and resources shared between the Gallery and the Department of Fine Arts was proving beneficial for both institutions. For some years, Lindsay had

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[24] Medley, 1946, np.

[25] ibid

[26] ibid. By the date of Medley's reply, Burke was already on his way to Australia. The letter was addressed care of Burke's former Masters supervisor, Theodore Sizer, at Yale University where Burke would shortly give the Ryerson Lecture before continuing on to Sydney.

[27] Felton, 1947, np.

[28] http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/archives/exhibitions/keys/web/272.html, accessed 17/2/08.

[29] 'Peace to war', WAAAF training film showing advancement through recruit training to various Air Force trades, Directorate of Training RAAF HQ, Albert Park, in collaboration with Visual Aids Centre, RAAF, AWM F03351, Australian War Memorial (AWM).

[30] Lindsay, 1952b, np.

been agitating for a research laboratory at the Gallery for the conservation and restoration of works, a goal that was eventually realised in 1952. Newman Rosenthal had played an active advisory role in the laboratory's technical aspects and its art conservation is likely to have been the subject of a lecture to the National Gallery Society's membership on the 16th April 1952, shortly after the laboratory's opening.[31] In collaboration with Rosenthal, works to be cleaned were photographed with infra red and ultra violet light to reveal the extent of damage and cracking and therefore determine the most suitable method of treatment.[32]

These new methods of visual representation and their impact in the field of conservation were not only important to the Gallery's staff but of growing public interest, nationally as well as internationally. In a move that finds comparison with the London National Gallery's 1947 'An Exhibition of Cleaned Pictures', the NGV began to temporarily hang 'cleaned' works in the gallery's South Rotunda to illustrate the resulting improvement.[33] NGV guide lecturer Arnold Shore noted in 1953, that the effect of cleaning 'was almost as though half of each picture was obscured by a very dirty glass or muslin … There could be no question that advantage of effect had been gained'.[34]

At the University, slides were playing an instrumental role in the teaching of art history, and the recording of the Department's history. Slides held a practical function in being able to communicate a visual image to a large number of viewers simultaneously, something that was central to effective teaching of the visual arts. By comparison, photographs or coloured reproductions, which for several decades had been the primary modes of exposing Australian artists to the latest trends in Europe, suffered from the limitation of not being able to be viewed by a group of students at one time.[35] In August 1954, Leonhard Adam, noted anthropologist and part-time lecturer in the Department of Fine Arts, received a series of photographs of indigenous rock paintings taken by Douglas Boerner of the Department of Works, Alice Springs. In his reply to Boerner, Adam addressed the preference for the teaching of art history through slides rather than photographs, writing, 'I should like to have your permission to have lantern slides made from these at our Dept. of Visual Aids, before returning them to you.'[36]

In a similar example in 1949, Charles Mountford sent Burke and Lindsay 'an interesting set of colour slides' of 'the bark drawings he had collected in the north'.[37] It is an interesting, early insight into the use of colour with slides. That Mountford chose slides, rather than photographs, suggests he intended the set to be used by Burke in the teaching of art history, though whether they were is unknown.

However, Mountford's success in using slides to document his expedition may have caught the attention of fellow indigenous anthropologist, Adam. Some years later, in May 1955, Adam took a group of University students on a field trip to Central Australia, taking with them a photographer from the University's Visual Aids Centre, David Corke.[38] The resulting series of glass slides is now held by the University's Ian Potter Museum of Art. Together with the photographic record of this expedition held amongst the Adam Papers, University of Melbourne Archives, the series

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[31] ibid
[32] Lindsay, 1952a, np.
[33] ibid
[34] Fraser, 1992, p. 23.
[35] Chanin, Miller, 2005, p. 111.
[36] Adam, 1954, np.
[37] Lindsay, 1949, np.
[38] Adam, 1955, np.

provides a fascinating insight into the excursion, and the role of slides in documenting the Department's early teaching programs.

The Department of Fine Arts slide library played more than simply a documentary role, however. From the outset, it was seen to be a significant didactic resource for the teaching of art history, and was successively built up by subsequent staff with this vision in mind; a role it has continued to fill well into the twenty-first century.

In 1958, a little over a decade after the Department had been founded, Joseph Burke wrote in support of encouraging a creative environment for the teaching of art history. Engagement with art, both at a secondary school level as well as with tertiary education, should not be studied in isolation, he argued. In achieving this goal, 'the teacher has certain powerful instruments at his disposal. The first of these instruments is visual aids'.[39]

> Today film-strips and photographs of contemporary architecture and industrial design can be secured by schools for the cost of a few shillings. The Visual Aids Department of the University of Melbourne, in collaboration with the Fine Arts Department, the Society of Designers in Industry and a number of distinguished experts, including critics and artists, has prepared a number of these film-strips, covering not only contemporary art overseas but also in Australia, and has undertaken to provide a nation-wide service on a cost basis.[40]

Writing to one of the Department's postgraduate students, Sister Margaret Manion, in 1971, Burke commented, 'As you know, Franz [Philipp] had built up a very large collection of renaissance slides.'[41] It was a fact already appreciated by Manion, who had completed her Masters Thesis in 1962 on the NGV's illuminated Wharncliffe Hours, and had continued in the field of Medieval and Renaissance studies. Franz Philipp had joined the Department in 1948 before being appointed as a full-time lecturer in 1949, specialising in Renaissance art. Trained in Vienna, he brought to the Department's early teaching of art history a scholarly approach in the Germanic tradition, recalled by one former student as 'erudite in an old-fashioned European way'.[42] Like many central European art historians, slides were integral to his teaching practices and were operated not by the lecturer himself, but an assistant. In the mid-1960s, a Mr Clark, custodian also of both the old and new arts buildings at the University, held this role. Patrick McCaughey, in his memoirs, offers this comical insight into Clark's position:

> Hopelessly overworked, he was grey-faced and coated, with a racking cough from chain-smoking, which he could not always repress in the projection booth during Franz's lectures. On one occasion the wrong slide came up. 'No, Mr Clark, you have the wrong slide on the right.' No response except the hacking cough. Growing mildly desperate, Franz pleaded, 'Mr Clark, I want the Nanni di Banco slide on the right.' More coughing and a rising tide of giggles from the class. Then silence. 'Come on, Mr Clark, please!' Then a loud voice from the booth: 'Do you mean the Chroist [*sic*] and Mary one?' 'Yes, Mr Clark, thank you.'[43]

When Margaret Manion joined the Department in the early 1970s following Philipp's unexpected death, Burke encouraged her not only to use the slide collection in her teaching, but also to be active in adding to it. Slides could be produced locally at the University if she was able to provide reference to published illustrations, but there was no substitute for obtaining slides directly from the international institutions that held the works. Burke wrote to Manion during her time in Rome, suggesting 'you might like to get slides made, or buy them from overseas while you are there.'[44] It

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[39] Burke, 1958, p. 6.
[40] ibid
[41] Burke, 1971, np.
[42] McCaughey, 2003, p. 57.
[43] ibid, pp. 57-58.
[44] Burke, 1971, np.

was a practice that would continue throughout the 1970s and 1980s, with slides being acquired from quality international providers, such as Scala.

Up until the 1970s, black and white slides remained the preference to colour slides. In part, this may have reflected a continuing legacy of pre-war artistic thought that maintained a more accurate representation of a work's tonal values could be obtained through black and white images. Colour slides, with their propensity for colours to distort over time, or be a poor representation of the work's original colour scheme from the outset, were viewed as something of a hindrance to effective teaching.

Yet there were other considerations. With slides still being produced from published reproductions, themselves often in black and white, a tendency naturally continued for the use of black and white copies. Former student and later lecturer Leigh Astbury recalls that in his undergraduate years in the late 1960s, black and white slides predominated as they were most strongly represented in the Department's slide collection.[45] With improvements to colour photographic technology, and a younger generation of art scholars being employed in the Department, colour slides were soon being adopted for teaching purposes. The new technology meant that students could engage with familiar images with 'fresh' eyes, and grants were regularly made from the Department's equipment fund for the continuing growth of the slide library. Slides were still being produced locally from reproductions, and to facilitate this, the Department's librarian was trained in photography and students permitted to use departmental photographic equipment.[46]

The collection in the twenty-first century

Today, the Elisabeth Murdoch Library maintains a collection of over 200,000 slides and photographs, continually drawn upon by both staff and students in the teaching of art history, as well as by outside institutions. The collection is physically organised using the Harvard University Fogg Art Museum Classification System, a model that is employed widely by large slide collections. Slides are arranged by country, by the major media groupings (Architecture, Sculpture, Design, Painting, Drawing, Prints and Photographs) and then within the drawers by artist's name, date of work and subject.

Like slide collections worldwide however, this collection has faced challenges raised by the increasing use of digital media, and the requirements of being able to manage and access images more efficiently. Digitisation projects have seen a substantial volume of images made available in an expanding online database of approximately 78,000 records and digital images, searchable by academic staff via a web interface. In addition are two digital image repositories consisting of an expanding archival directory of 14,000 high-resolution tiff files, and a directory for online delivery of 14,000 medium sized files. While such projects are of immeasurable value for the long-term viability of such collections, the ability to 'browse the collection and to juxtapose slides on a slide table … in order to help the user compare images' remains a key, and fundamental strength of slide collections.[47]

While the slide collection remains central to the department's teaching, as Burke predicted, other resources illustrate the Elisabeth Murdoch Library's breadth and strengths. In addition to housing the School's thesis collection, the early years of the then stand-alone Department of Fine Arts are

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[45] Astbury, 2008, np.
[46] Manion, 2008, np.
[47] R. Lack, 'The Pattern of Slide Library Circulation: A Study', in Walsh, 2002, p. 41.

documented through a collection of lanternslides previously used for teaching purposes, the Joseph Burke, Witt and Illustrated Bartsch archives, and a rare book collection built up over decades by former staff.

As the Library has grown in more recent years to accommodate related disciplines, the changes have been reflected in the scope of its collections. These include separate holdings of the Education Resource Centre and Monash slide collections, approximately 7,000 monographs and journals, rare books, and microfilm collections from the Bibliotheque Nationale de France and the British Library. The inclusion of cinema studies encouraged the growth of the Library's Cinema Resources Centre, comprising a catalogued collection of 16mm film, VHS and DVD material, while membership to various film archives offers students access to film based material not otherwise available.[48]

The Fine Arts slide library, much expanded but still a primary resource of the Elisabeth Murdoch Library collections, has been a focal point for the teaching of art history at the University since the founding of the *Herald* Chair of Fine Arts more than sixty years ago. Its importance as a teaching resource was immediately grasped by those influential in founding the tertiary teaching of art history in Melbourne. Inaugural *Herald Chair* Joseph Burke's influence in shaping the slide library's initial structure affords the collection significant importance in the discipline's history at University of Melbourne. However, Burke's position as Australia's first professional tertiary educator of fine arts offers a further layer of national importance to the library. The choice of slide subjects both informed and reflected the core strengths of the discipline as it was taught at the University of Melbourne. Yet the collection was never envisaged as being static, and has been actively added to and shaped by subsequent staff of the Department of Fine Arts. In the early years of the twenty-first century, as digital media plays an increasing role in the teaching of the visual arts, continuing projects of digitisation ensure that the wealth of the slide library continues to maintain a central position as a practical and essential resource for the teaching of art history in Melbourne.

***Benjamin Thomas** is a doctoral candidate with the School of Culture and Communication, The University of Melbourne, completing his thesis on the Australian artist and art administrator Sir Daryl Lindsay (1889-1976).*

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[48] Brown, 2008, np.

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