



RECIPIENTS OF THE 2009 ICOM AUSTRALIA AWARD FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



presented by Craddock Morton on 19 May 2009 during the Museums Australia National Conference, Newcastle + presentation photographs by Gavin Fry

Welcome to the awarding of the 2009 ICOM Australia Award for International Relations. This important award recognises and celebrates the outstanding work undertaken by individuals and Australian institutions that has strengthened international relations and contributed to the cultural richness of our region.

The award was initiated in 2007, with Questacon and Will Inveen winning for their outstanding cooperative initiatives with science centres in Asia and the Pacific. In 2009 the Award is again presented in two categories; recognising individual Australian museum workers and an Australian museum for outstanding work in promoting international relations — either for a discrete project or an ongoing initiative that strengthens museum relations internationally, promotes information sharing across borders and distributes resources worldwide.

Projects or initiatives recognised by the award can be from any area of museum practice (for example, audience development, collection management, exhibitions, education, management, marketing, research or sponsorship). The project or initiative must have occurred in the period January 2008 to April 2009.

The award is judged by members of the ICOM Australia Executive Board and representatives from the international museum sector. The judging panel received a number of submissions, and were pleased to learn about so much important and innovative work that Australian museums and museum workers are undertaking in partnership with so many international organisations. They were left with a real sense that all of us working in the industry today benefit from the great examples set by colleagues who have been contributing for many decades to our profession, both locally and in the international arena.

Not surprisingly the judges' decision-making was complicated by the diversity and quality of work being undertaken. All the entries deserve applause and credit for their outstanding work.

This year the judges have decided to award two joint winners in the individual category, and one in the institutional category. Each has made quite separate and distinct contributions to international relations through their work, which reflects the diversity inherent in museum practice.

The three recipients for this year are all people without whom our industry would be the poorer, and Australia's contribution to international relations particularly so.

Between them, our three recipients lead the way in the areas of:

- Impacting high level industry policy
- Institutional-wide commitment to international programmes
- And at a curatorial level, dealing with international and national relations

The judges therefore decided the following: The **institutional award** goes to **RMIT Gallery** in Melbourne, **with special acknowledgement of the leadership of its Director, Suzanne Davies.**



Craddock Morton with Sarah Morris



Sarah Morris, RMIT Gallery

RMIT Gallery's continued focus amply fulfils the ICOM and UNESCO agenda of increasing cross-cultural awareness. This is achieved particularly through a commitment to presenting the work of international art, craft and design in Australia, as well as developing ongoing presentations of the work of Australian artists, designers and craftspeople internationally, in particular in India and Germany.

Suzanne Davies is the Director and Chief Curator, a position that she has held since the opening of the gallery in 1996. Under her leadership the Gallery has undertaken international initiatives including, but not limited to:

- *Threading the Commonwealth*, an exhibition for the Melbourne Commonwealth Games, which focused on work from 57 countries, which has led to a project for the forthcoming Delhi Commonwealth Games.
- With the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs, sending exhibitions to Malaysia, Singapore, and India.
- A strong relationship with the Goethe Institute, which has brought many projects to the gallery.
- Numerous exhibitions presented in conjunction with artists and galleries from Singapore, China, Germany, Hong Kong and many others.

Sarah Morris (Exhibitions Coordinator, RMIT) accepted the award on behalf of her institution.

The judges found it impossible to separate two further industry leaders, and so unanimously have decided to jointly award the individual award to two people.

Firstly, the **individual award** to be **jointly presented** to **Dr Ron Vanderwal**, Senior Curator – Anthropology (Oceania) at Museum Victoria.



Craddock Morton with Ron Vanderwal



Ron Vanderwal, Museum Victoria

Ron is recognized for his personal engagement with the people and museum collections of the Pacific region, in particular those of Fiji and the Fijian Diaspora in Australia. His humanist perspective and respect for indigenous culture continues to make a long-standing contribution, which benefits both Fiji and Australia, and especially their museums.

For more than 25 years, Ron Vanderwal has been associated with the anthropological collections at Museum Victoria, principally those from the Torres Strait and the Pacific Islands. During this period, Ron's professional standing in Australia's museum community has come to be defined by that association, in large part because of his expert knowledge of its archaeological and ethnographic components, and his general insights into the art and material culture of the Pacific.

Of equal importance, however, are the connections that Ron has with the peoples from whose traditional homelands the collections were derived. Ron has always been a passionate champion of Indigenous rights, especially with regard to cultural heritage, and over the years has developed close professional and personal relationships with many of the Indigenous people with whom he has worked. He is particularly committed to supporting their self-management of their own collections, and improving self-determination.

The particular project that we also wish to highlight with this award is the long-standing and multi-dimensional association with the Fiji Museum, which prophetically started at the ICOM General Conference in Melbourne in 1998. This led to an MOU being signed between Melbourne Museum and the Fiji Museum, and has resulted in a number of major initiatives including:

- A web site featuring highlights of Fijian objects in the two museums.
- Development of new collection storage facilities at the Fiji Museum, which involved staff exchanges, training, collection assessments.

In the words of Dr Vanderwal's nominee, *I am delighted to nominate Ron for the 2009 ICOM Australia International Relations Award. I can think of no other person who has done as much to build enduring institutional relationships with overseas museums.*

And secondly, the **individual award** is to be **jointly presented to Bernice Murphy**.



Craddock Morton with Bernice Murphy



Bernice Murphy, Chair ICOM Ethics Committee

Bernice continues to make a major contribution on a significant level to issues that are at the core of museological practice. Her work in relation to ICOM's Code of Ethics impacts and guides the work of our profession both in Australia and worldwide. She has also made a major contribution to placing Australia and our museum profession on the international stage.

Bernice Murphy moved from lecturing to the field of art museums in the late 1970s, to become Australia's first Curator of Contemporary Art, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. After this she moved to the University of Sydney in a joint appointment (with Leon Paroissien) to pursue development of a new type of institution in Australia – a museum of contemporary art. Later this was to become the MCA Sydney, located proudly and prominently on Circular Quay in Sydney. They started with 2.5 employees and grew to over 100.

A member of ICOM since the early 1980s, she has held the following positions:

- Vice-President, ICOM 1995-2004.
 - Member of the ICOM Legal Affairs and Properties Committee 2001-2004.
 - Chair and Coordinator of the ICOM Reform Task Force 1999-2001.
 - A member of the ICOM Ethics Committee 1999-2004.
- And is currently its Chair since 2005, and will be until 2011. In her roles for ICOM she has had to deal with international diplomacy at the highest level. Bernice has the vital capacity to refocus, challenge and further update the Codes of practice under which we all work and which we commit ourselves as members of ICOM. She stands as an example to us all in terms of her dedication, intellectual rigour and selflessness.

We thank all of our winners for their outstanding work and contribution to international relations! Look out for more information about the winners on the ICOM web site and in ICOM publications.

We encourage all of you to consider nominating your colleagues for the 2010 award. Information about this will be available on our web site later this year.

And for you who aren't yet individual members of ICOM – now is a great time to join and become involved in the international museums sector!