

School of Culture and Communication

Art History and Cinema/Screen Studies programs

Submission to the University of Melbourne Information Futures Commission

Elisabeth Murdoch Library to be transformed into an digital image repository for teaching and research

Background: A significant cultural collection

The Elisabeth Murdoch Library is a large collection of photographic reproductions of approximately 200,000 works of art (in slide format), hundreds of film stills, films (on DVD, video and 16mm celluloid), computer games (Playstation, Nintendo, PC formats) and art books. The gathering together of these resources in one place constitutes an extremely valuable cultural collection of the University of Melbourne. Many programs, schools and individual researchers at the University use reproductions of works of art and other cultural artefacts in teaching and research. Currently used intensively by staff and students in the University, with proper resourcing, the Elisabeth Murdoch Library has the potential to provide its existing services to a much broader section of the University community than is currently the case. With very little input, the library could become a University-wide resource for the provision, maintenance and control of quality digital images.

The Library is full of rare visual material representing generations of research. For example it contains the original photographs made in slide form of Arthur Boyd's work for the monograph written by Franz Phillip, as well as a rare first edition of the publication. Some of the objects photographed no longer exist or have 'disappeared' into private collections. This gives the collection a research basis that would in no way be substituted by casual appropriation of material by individuals from the internet. Indeed, in many cases, such as contemporary (international and contemporary) art and design, performance, indigenous art and new media, images and video footage are not available on the internet or in existing subscription image databases such as Grove. The slides in the collection were acquired from many sources: purchased from galleries, museums and other commercial suppliers, or taken by members of staff. The collection has recently been augmented by other institutional donations of works and now represents one of the largest University collections of its kind in the country.

Beyond its status as a cultural and research collection, the Library is an audio-visual and information resource in teaching and learning in tutorial rooms and lecture theatres. Currently the collection is particularly heavily used by lecturers, research associates, tutors and students in Art History, Curatorship, Cinema/Screen Studies, Architecture, Conservation, Archaeology, the Victorian College of the Arts and other University Art History departments in Melbourne. Lecturers and tutors regularly use the slides for lectures and tutorials, as do students preparing class or seminar papers use the collection.

A valuable research and teaching digital resource for the C21st

Many researchers and teachers would prefer to use digital versions of visual works. They are more easily retrieved and are often of superior quality to those images to be found on the internet. It is acknowledged that use of this media can only occur with appropriate copyright clearance. Over the past few years, the staff of the Elisabeth Murdoch Library has been systematically digitising the collection. As a result of the money provided by a Competitive Grant for Improvement and Innovation Projects directly related to L&TPF, 14,000 of these slides are now recorded digitally on a database. This digitisation project has been carried out with careful attention to copyright obligations. It has been a time consuming and laborious process, in which much has already been invested.

The Elisabeth Murdoch Library could easily be resourced to serve the image reproduction needs in research and teaching for the entire University community. In particular, it could house good quality digital reproductions of the University's many outstanding cultural collections, making them more accessible to students and staff alike via a central image repository. Images of representative samples of the millions of items contained in the 33 recognised cultural collections owned by the University of Melbourne could be contained and co-ordinated by this image repository, increasing their exposure, accessibility to the staff and students of the University, attracting and promoting research.

In addition, a well maintained and resourced digital repository has potential to attract linkages with industry partners such as city and regional art galleries (including the National Gallery of Victoria who are currently in the process of digitising their collection), museums and libraries (such as the State Library who have a collection of over 200,000 digitised images – mostly black and white photographs) and organizations representing the interests of artists (for example Viscopy, who handle copyright collection for artistic work).

The recently formed School of Culture and Communication provides potential for further expanding the role of the Elisabeth Murdoch Library in exciting new directions. While the Library has been an important film and television resource for Cinema staff and students for many years, it now services Media

and Cultural Studies staff and students as well. Staff from Screen Studies are in discussions with the staff from the Australian Centre for the Moving Image for an ARC-Linkage collaboration (which will also include computer game companies) to develop a fully-playable database that records the history of computer games. The visual focus of Elisabeth Murdoch Library makes it the ideal location for the repository, making the University of Melbourne a key international hub for Game Studies resources.

Over 50% of Australian games companies are based in Melbourne and this would be an opportunity to collaborate with these industry partners and to also develop the expanding area of Game Studies, which is in great demand nationally and internationally. The Director of Scholarly Information and the Director of Information Management have already responded enthusiastically to this proposal and have suggested a trial pilot of a few, selected test cases.

Progress-to-date

There have long been plans to make the Elisabeth Murdoch Library's collection available to a broader part of the University community but resourcing limitations have meant that this was not possible due to the cost in labour time and other facilities in managing the extra demand. The collection would be an invaluable resource for more stimulating and engaging teaching approaches and would prove valuable to areas across the Arts Faculty as well as other faculties across the University. It would also generate an environment that could bring together scholars from across the University, thus fostering new research possibilities and potential industry partnerships.

The success of a University-wide image resource centre would require:

- the maintenance of material production, storage and delivery of copies of works of art, film and other visual media;
- the transformation of some of the space (which currently contains filing cabinets containing slides) into computer hubs that make possible individual access to the collection;
- the management of the complex copyright arrangements involved the dissemination of images for use in publications, public lectures and other knowledge transfer activities.

Managing copyright compliance

Reproduction and communication of artistic works is strictly limited under the *Copyright Act 1968* (Cth). The Part VB statutory licence for educational use does permit reproduction in some instances although this is accompanied by various administrative requirements and restrictions on access, which would preclude public use. To avoid contraventions of copyright law, it is proposed that the Elisabeth Murdoch Library become a clearing house for all

reproductions of works of art and other audio-visual material used in teaching and public lectures.

The future

The demand for digital visual imagery will only increase as the University's New Generation degree is implemented, with its emphasis on innovative e-learning. Appropriate resourcing of this rich collection with its established facilities, staff and working procedures, will allow the Elisabeth Murdoch Library to become a unique service for image delivery and copyright management not only to the broader University community but also to the community in general. There is great potential to establish links with industry partners, especially in the area of Australian art, Screen Studies and gaming, and there is also potential to develop commercial applications of the existing services provided by the library. To this end, we submit that the existing visual resources be maintained and expanded to meet the growing demands of the digital age.

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