

Australian University Art Museums Benchmarking Report

Prepared for

University Art Museums Australia

Summary of key findings

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Executive summary

The University Art Museums Australia (UAMA) Directors' Group commissioned a benchmarking study to identify the contributions that university art museums (UAMs) make to Australia's visual arts sector and the community. The Directors' Group hopes to use the information to define and advance the sector, and foster best practice. This report will also give other UAMs data that they can use to evaluate their own operations and determine future directions.

UAMs comprise 26 per cent of the art museum sector. Their university art collections offer a rich cultural history and their exhibition programs attract university staff and students, members of the art community and the general public. They showcase prominent and emerging Australian, Indigenous and international artists through exhibitions, acquisitions, public art commissions, publications and festivals. Situated within universities, UAMs actively engage in both research and teaching. Their programs cross disciplines, and encourage discourse and debate.

The vision and mission statements of all eight surveyed UAMs emphasise the importance of enhancing the university's profile and providing a teaching resource for staff and students. These statements also prioritise working to best practice, entering partnerships and alliances to raise funds, and enhancing critical engagement in the visual arts sector.

UAMs offer professional development, training and mentorship to students and professionals working within the visual arts sector. They also initiate collaborative partnerships and outreach activities to stakeholders outside the university. These partnerships engage the community, open up new funding streams and raise the profile of both the university and the art museum.

Parent universities provide the core funding for the operational expenses of UAMs. UAMs apply for funding from external sources to pay for exhibitions, acquisitions, publications and other expenses. Staff salaries are the largest expense for each UAM, making up 39–66 per cent of their total expenditure. Acquisitions and exhibitions are the next largest expenses.

UAMs present 5–17 exhibitions a year, including collection-based, thematic, touring and, in some cases, student work. They also hold public programs, though most UAMs have not taken up the opportunities that online access presents, such as transcripts, podcasts and a national collections database. The UAMs produce on average 1–6 exhibition-related publications each year, which are sometimes funded through grants, sponsorship, donor support and catalogue sales. Occasionally UAMs develop partnerships to produce their publications.

This report makes the following recommendations to define the role and improve the performance of the university art museum sector:

- undertake a national survey of Australian UAMs to assess their roles and the contributions they make as a sector, and define how they fit into the broader arts community
- review each UAM's mission and vision statement, and strategic plan to ensure these align with its operational plan and parent university's mission
- encourage greater access to the UAM collections by developing online, fully searchable catalogues and a national database
- explore avenues to strengthen links to teaching, learning and audience development; for example, by providing curriculum-relevant activities, training and information sessions, and access to online programs for the general public
- analyse audience attendance and composition to develop relevant programs and encourage increased visitor numbers
- commission a literature search and environmental scan of existing partnerships, and use this information to obtain funding to advance key partnerships
- work more closely with the parent university to raise awareness within the university community of the UAM and the valuable intellectual and cultural contribution it makes

- have UAMA advocate to the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee to argue on behalf of the UAM sector for funding under government grant programs.

Introduction

In 2007 the University Art Museums Australia (UAMA) Directors' Group commissioned a benchmarking study as the first stage of research to assess how Australian university art museums contribute to universities, the visual arts sector and the community.

The eight UAMs are:

- The Ian Potter Museum of Art (The University of Melbourne, Melbourne)
- Ivan Dougherty Gallery (The University of New South Wales, Sydney)
- John Curtin Gallery (Curtin University of Technology, Perth)
- Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery (The University of Western Australia, Perth)
- Monash University Museum of Art (Monash University, Melbourne)
- QUT Art Museum (Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane)
- Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art (University of South Australia, Adelaide)
- The University of Queensland Art Museum (The University of Queensland, Brisbane).

An overview of the university art museum sector

Definition

For this study, the UAMA Directors' Group defines a UAM as a professional art museum that conducts a public program of changing exhibitions, and is also responsible for and exhibits an art collection on behalf of a university. UAMs link professional visual arts practices with the university's teaching, research and community-engagement objectives. UAMs have regular opening hours during which the general public can visit. UAMs are eligible for cultural gifts register status, and have clearly defined governance and recognised corporate policies.

Australia's UAM sector comprises 42 university art museums that represent 26 per cent of the art museum sector. This report does not provide a history and overarching definition of the UAM sector's role or purpose, or describe the sector's nature, extent and significance. However, it does make contextual observations to provide a setting for current research.

According to available literature, UAMs perform many roles, and their contributions are significant and far reaching. UAMs have been defined as:

- unique centres of learning. Through their collections and curriculum-relevant, interdisciplinary and innovative programs of exhibitions, publications, and educational and public activities, UAMs are a valuable teaching and learning resource for university staff, students, scholars, curators, artists, writers, and the broader community
- catalysts and agents of change. They are 'innovative, interdisciplinary and challenging [and] are uniquely placed to initiate and support experimental and interdisciplinary activity'. UAMs can give other public museums and galleries access to new research and scholarship, publicly engage with topical issues with greater immediacy, and investigate areas that are often ignored
- a 'national treasure-trove making a substantial contribution to our cultural wealth'. UAMs are major investors in visual arts and crafts. They acquire and commission artworks, and

professionally care for the university art collection, some of which have scholarly, art historical and heritage value

- 'conduits between universities and the wider world. [They] operate fluently at various levels from the global to the local'. [UAMs are] 'partners both within the university and with external bodies and cultural institutions at regional, national and international levels'. UAMs achieve this through community outreach programs and partnerships, artist-in-residency programs, public art commissions, and their involvement in local, national and international cultural activities, such as exhibition exchanges and festivals
- training institutions and centres for professional development and mentorship. UAMs offer internships and supervised volunteer programs to university students and aspiring arts professionals, who then gain valuable hands-on experience within the UAM.

UAMs differ from public art museums and galleries because they are situated within higher learning institutions. Many UAMs serve both academic and non-academic audiences. They are laboratories for new research, teaching, learning and professional development, and they extend beyond the university campus into the arts and public communities. Some UAMs, particularly those situated in regional cities, also serve as the principal museum in their region and have a significantly wider audience.

The current situation

The results of this research show that the eight surveyed UAMs:

- offer a rich cultural history, and are custodians of significant cultural collections and heritage that date back to the mid-19th century. In 2006 their estimated total value was \$134 million
- collectively spend more than \$2 million a year on acquisitions
- currently, or will soon, occupy purpose-built, architecturally designed or refurbished buildings that are equipped with museum-standard facilities, and centrally located in capital cities and major regional centres
- charge no entry fees
- hold an average of 10.5 exhibitions a year free to the Australian public and international visitors
- are generally open to the public six days a week and on weekends
- each attract up to 37,000 visitors a year to exhibitions, and collectively attract almost 150,000 visitors a year
- collectively spend more than \$6.5 million a year collecting, conserving, displaying, interpreting, and promoting artworks. UAMs recorded art collection management and development, including conservation and acquisitions, on their top five expenditure items
- operate to best-practice standards.

What university art museums deliver

Existing literature on the UAM sector recognises the contribution UAMs make to the arts both nationally and internationally. UAMs have the unique potential to actively engage in research and teaching. For example, by regularly changing exhibitions, publications, educational and public programs, and outreach activities, they can deliver culturally enriching and intellectually engaging programs. These programs range from art history studies to surveys of contemporary art and artists, and cover disciplines from science to sport. They inspire critical inquiry and new scholarship, and provide students, staff, researchers, artists, writers, and curators from public museums and galleries with access to new research that has been overlooked or neglected.

Each UAM manages its collection as a valuable university asset that provides a rich teaching and learning resource, and utilises its collection's significant intellectual and cultural value. UAM exhibitions regularly showcase artworks from these collections, and UAMs often lend the artworks to public museums and galleries. Students, scholars, writers and curators often undertake scholarly research on a collection's artworks, and some UAMs provide a searchable online catalogue, including essays and images of artworks, to ensure their collections are widely accessible. The report, *Transforming Cinderella collections: the management and conservation of Australian university museums, collections and herbaria* (the Cinderella Report) notes that these collections contain items of national and international significance, and 'form a substantial part of the nation's moveable cultural heritage'. The Cinderella Report also highlights the intellectual and aesthetic value of university art collections as teaching aids, catalysts for new research and outreach programs, and tools for enhancing the quality of campus life.

In line with the university's mission to teach and learn, develop partnerships and engage the community, UAM staff regularly offer their services and expertise to the university and community. Museum staff contribute to the university's teaching programs, and offer valuable professional training and mentorship through volunteer programs and internships to students and those pursuing an arts career.

UAMs also initiate and develop collaborative partnerships and outreach activities with external stakeholders, including arts and other cultural organisations, artists, curators, writers, scholars, architects and community members, all of whom work with the UAMs on exhibitions, publications, public artwork commissions and other activities. These collaborations and partnerships not only actively engage the community, but also provide access to new funding streams, and raise the profile and status of the UAM and university. They can facilitate valuable links and partnerships with the university, regional agencies and stakeholders locally, nationally and internationally.

Funding

UAMs usually offer programs and services for free or on a not-for-profit basis. In Australia, most UAMs receive their core funding for operational expenses from a parent university, and they seek supplementary funding from external funding sources for exhibitions, acquisitions, publications and special projects. However, in an increasingly competitive environment, these external funding sources are limited and not guaranteed.

UAM history

Table 1 on the following page is an overview of each UAM's development.

Table 1: Historical development of the eight UAMs

Year founded	Year relocated to new premises	Reason established	UAM	Purpose built or refurbished	Collection established
1973	1998	To house and display the collection	IP	Purpose built and refurbished	1853
1977	1981	To provide a teaching resource, community facility and exhibition venue	IDG	Plans underway to build a new gallery	Info not supplied
1998	1998	To showcase the university and develop community links. The collection was established as a teaching resource and to display works on campus	JCG	Purpose built	1967
Early 1970s	1990	To house and display the collection, and present exhibitions	LWAG	Purpose built	1927
1975	1987	To provide first-hand experiences of art-making and presentation, hold exhibitions relevant to academic programs, and establish a public gallery of standing and relevance to the wider community	MUMA	Purpose built. Plans underway to build a new gallery	1961
2000	2000	To house and display the collection	QUTAM	Refurbished	1945
c1977	2007	To complement the art school activities and manage the collection	SAM	Purpose built	Info not supplied
1976	2004	To house the collection and provide an exhibition venue	UQAM	Refurbished	1941

Table 1 reveals that:

- Six of the eight UAMs were established in the 1970s.
- Four UAMs were established to house and display the university's art collection, while the other four were established primarily to provide a teaching resource, community facility or exhibition venue, and showcase the university.
- Four UAMs were, or soon will be, purpose built, three have been refurbished, and one has been both purpose built and refurbished.
- The primary role of most UAMs has remained unchanged, though for some the emphasis has shifted towards more contemporary, thematic and curated exhibitions.
- While only three UAMs stated that they were established for the primary purpose of providing a teaching and research resource, other UAMs also mention holding exhibitions of student works and enhancing the university's cultural profile.

5.2 University art collections

Each of the eight universities surveyed had an art collection prior to museums being established. Table 1 above indicates that an existing art collection was a primary reason for a UAM being established. The collections range from mid-19th century to 21st century. Each UAM manages its university's art collection as a university asset, and is responsible for cataloguing, obtaining insurance, auditing and managing risk. UAMs often display a collection's artworks across campuses as well as in UAM exhibitions, and may lend them to other institutions for exhibitions. Most UAMs make the collection available for teaching, and private and professional research. They store any artworks not on display within the museum, on the university campus, and in dedicated off-site collection stores.

- The eight UAMs manage 38 639 works in total, and each UAM manages an average of 4829 works.
- The total value of the UAM collections is more than \$134 million. Each collection's average value is more than \$16.79 million.

UAMs develop their collections through purchases, bequests, direct gifts, commissions and the federal government's Cultural Gifts Program, for which all UAMs are eligible.

Facilities

Table 3 details each UAM's buildings and facilities.

Table 3: UAM buildings and facilities

UAM	Museum and international standards	Building renovations	Total square metres	Total linear metres	Height	Collection storage
IP	Yes	Yes, following new museum's opening	2263 m²	248.97 m	Variable	Museum, campus and off site
IDG	Yes	None	220 m ^{2*}	64.30 m	4.88 m	Main UNSW campus
JCG [^]	Yes	None, only internal layout changes	925 m ²	225.925 m maximum (including moveable walls)	4 m (gallery) and 6.3 m (foyer)	Museum
LWAG	Yes, since upgraded	None to the building's exterior since 1990 opening	775 m ^{2#}	204–260 m (depending on if using moveable walls)	3.9 m	Museum
MUMA	Yes	Extensions to storage in 2003	281.4 m ²	107.2 m	3.43 m	Museum and off site
QUTAM	Yes	None	605 m ²	250 m	2.88 m	Museum and campus
SAM	Yes	None	500 m ²	153.05 m [*]	4.5–4.9 m	Campus
UQAM	Yes	None	1288 m ²	240 m	4 m and 3.6 m	Museum

Note: As not all UAMs indicated each display space's size, these figures should be used with discretion. The UAMs' data did not clearly show whether measurements included non-display spaces and moveable walls. Some figures are also based on averages and estimations.

* This figure includes office space.

[^] JCG does not include figures for the Access Gallery.

[#] LWAG reports that dedicated exhibition space is 565 m² plus 210 m² of common space, used for exhibitions and functions.

Table 3 reveals that:

- Each UAM's space size varies considerably.
- All UAMs work to at least basic museum and international standards, including climate control, monitored lighting, fire protection and security.
- Most UAMs have a number of interconnecting display spaces rather than a single, divisible space.
- Most UAMs store their collections within the museum, though five UAMs also have dedicated storage facilities in other parts of the campus or off site.

Governance and planning

UAM's position, director's status and reporting line

All the UAMs are organisationally linked to the university, whether as a subsidiary operation, a department or part of a faculty. UAM directors report to a senior manager within the university, such as the vice chancellor, deputy vice chancellor or faculty dean.

The UAM directors are classified as professional, administration/executive or general staff, except two directors who are classified as academic staff and one who is professional, but who also holds associate professor status.

- Most UAMs have a formal board or advisory committee.
- Most UAMs are chaired by a university representative, usually the Vice-Chancellor, which sends a strong message that the university is the UAM's most important stakeholder. The Vice-Chancellor also appoints a number of board or committee members who are often university employees.
- The compositions of the UAM boards or committees vary considerably. Most comprise university staff, such as deans, faculty staff and senior academics, while others also include up to nine external members of the arts and business communities.
- The central roles of the boards or committees are similar i.e. advising, approving and assisting in areas such as policy, collection development and fundraising. However, the level of engagement and responsibility varies; for example, one oversees a UAM's activities while another regularly gives advice and endorses a UAM's operations and direction. While most boards or committees assist in collection development, fundraising and community-link development, some perform a stronger advisory role in operational management, strategic planning, policy, accountability and programming.
- There is no student representation on any UAM boards or advisory committees.

Management and operations

- The parent university is the largest income source for most UAMs, and they use this income for operational expenses.
- The second highest income source for most UAMs is fundraising, including government grants, donations and sponsorship. Some UAMs also receive income from touring exhibitions, venue hire, and commercial activities such as publication sales and consultancies.
- Only two UAMs receive income through venue hire. No UAMs directly receive research funding for exhibitions and catalogues. Some UAMs indicate that they seek funding from other sources, including university bequests, university research centres and Australian Research Council partnerships.
- Most UAMs reported staff salaries as their largest operational expense. Permanent staff was rated highest, followed by consultants and contractors, and then casual staff. In 2007 staff salaries made up 39–66 per cent of their total expenditure.

- The two second-largest expenditure items were acquisitions/collection development/commissions, and exhibitions/research and development. These were followed by administration, publications, collection care and conservation, and advertising and marketing.

Programming

Exhibitions

UAMs present scholarly, challenging and innovative exhibitions that range from historical to contemporary, group to solo, as well as artist surveys and retrospectives. Exhibitions can be interdisciplinary and intercultural. Most UAMs have several exhibition spaces, and sometimes use other spaces on and off campus. Several universities have a separate, student-focused gallery such as the Tom Heath Gallery at QUTAM where student artworks are exhibited.

- Each UAM presents 5–12 exhibitions a year—a yearly average of 10.5. However, the exhibition number is not indicative of a UAM’s activity level, as some larger exhibitions occupy museum spaces while others are numerous, smaller exhibitions shown concurrently in multiple spaces. Several UAMs indicated they have 4–5 exhibition changeover periods.
- UAMs present a broad range of exhibitions, including collection-based, touring and thematic exhibitions.
- Most UAMs present at least one collection-based exhibition each year, and up to 50 per cent of some exhibition programs are collection-based.
- Most UAMs present 1–4 incoming touring exhibitions that originate from many sources, including peer-to-peer initiatives or collaborations, as well as package deals toured by major state and regional galleries, and Australian and overseas cultural organisations. Most UAMs generate 1–2 outgoing exhibitions every 1–2 years.
- Most UAMs have museum staff curate their exhibition programs, and have external curators/consultants, or faculty staff and students, curate the remaining exhibitions.
- UAMs present an average of 1.5 faculty staff, student and alumni exhibitions each year. These exhibitions involve external curators, academic staff, students and alumni. In some cases, these exhibitions are initiatives of the museum, and faculty staff and students.
- Each UAM offers online information about its exhibition program.

Public programs and events

All UAMs present exhibition or collection-related public programs. These include floor talks, guided tours, symposia, conferences, forums, public lectures, artist talks, performances, and programs specifically designed for students, teachers, and the visual arts and wider communities. Two UAMs include film screenings in their public programs. Most UAMs present public programs weekly, though some present them ad hoc or when required.

- Most UAMs offer teacher information sessions, training programs, and curriculum-relevant programs, which is in line with their claim in their vision/mission statements and strategic goals that teaching and research were their primary goals, and secondary and tertiary students were their primary target audiences.
- While all UAMs stress the importance of the public and connections with the community in their vision, mission and strategic goals, only three UAMs offer online access to its public programs via transcripts, podcasts and iTunes.
- Some UAMs are more committed and proactive than others in developing links and partnerships with primary stakeholders through public programs and events, i.e. the university, visual arts community, secondary and tertiary education sector, and the general community.

UAM relationships to academic and non-academic programs

All UAMs recognise the importance of building a relationship with their parent university, teaching and learning, engaging the community and developing partnerships. All UAMs have developed formal or informal relationships with their university community and, to varying degrees, developed links between academic and non-academic programs and communities.

However, some UAMs have been more proactive and inventive in initiating and developing more enduring relationships, rather than one-off, project-based interactions. They have achieved this through teaching, professional development and training programs that target university students and staff, but also engage the general community.

Publications

- UAMs produce 1–6 mostly exhibition-related publications a year.
- UAMs produce other printed materials, including exhibition brochures, booklets, newsletters, and marketing materials that promote UAM programs and activities.
- Publications and printed materials are funded through museum and exhibition budgets, external funding such as grants, sponsorship and donor support, and income from catalogue sales.
- These publications have target audiences that include students, scholars, arts sector, members and supporters, media, libraries and specialist art bookstores, collectors and international audiences. UAMs report the university community and education sector generally as their largest target audience, including schools and libraries.