

History curatorship in Australia
Case studies from the National Museum of Australia 1991–2008

by

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

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Abstract

The main argument of this thesis is that history curatorship in Australia does not, as yet, possess a mature critical culture. While there is a growing literature in the academy about museums, there is surprisingly little material written by practising history curators. History curatorship, as such, lacks a tradition of critical writing about its professional practice. All too often curators move from one project to the next with little time to reflect on the way they work. While some curators have written about their work the impression emerges that history curators are still struggling to define what it is they do and how they do it.

In this thesis I explore the relationship between theory and practice, or praxis, in relation to history curatorship. In most exhibitions curators seek to apply a theoretical framework to the subject matter they are working on. In some instances this is a self conscious process and in others it is implicit in their work. I will explore a series of case studies from projects I have completed at the NMA to explore this relationship in my own work. As such the thesis is designed to be an interrogation of my own professional practice. Reflecting on the work I have completed provides some valuable insights into the practice of history curatorship.

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