

Interpretation policy

POL C-007

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1. Title

Interpretation policy

2. Introduction

The National Museum of Australia (the Museum) is a major cultural institution charged with researching, collecting, preserving and exhibiting historical material of the Australian nation. The Museum focuses on the three interrelated areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture, Australia's history and society since European settlement in 1788 and the interaction of people with the environment.

Established in 1980, the Museum is a publicly funded institution governed as a statutory authority in the Commonwealth Arts portfolio. The Museum's building on Acton Peninsula, Canberra opened in March 2001.

3. Scope

This policy covers all Museum exhibitions, programs, activities and operations which facilitate understanding of the Museum's collection including exhibitions, educational and public programs, and print and electronic publishing.

3.1 Description

This policy establishes the principles that guide the Museum's approach to interpretation and the framework within which interpretative strategies are developed.

3.2 Purpose

The Museum interprets the collection using a wide range of interpretative strategies. As interpretation involves the work of professional staff across the Museum, this policy provides a framework to ensure consistency across the Museum.

3.3 Rationale

Section 6, Part 1, of the *National Museum of Australia Act 1980* states the following as functions of the Museum:

- to exhibit, or to make available for exhibition by others, historical material from the national historical collection or historical material that is otherwise in the possession of the Museum
- from time to time as the occasion requires, to exhibit, by itself or in collaboration with others, in Australia or elsewhere, material, whether in written form or any other form and whether relating to Australia or to a foreign country
- to disseminate information relating to Australian history and information relating to the Museum and its functions.

4. Principles or guidelines

4.1 Engaging visitors and users

The Museum's collection is interpreted in vital and engaging ways – with clarity, cogency and meaningful context. The Museum's interpretative strategies aim to inspire, to arouse and satisfy curiosity, to educate and to entertain.

4.2 Centrality of collections

The Museum's collections are central to the Museum's interpretative strategies and to the dissemination of information about Australian history and society.

4.3 Research and scholarship

The Museum's interpretative strategies are based on the best research and scholarship available.

4.4 Diversity of interpretive strategies

The Museum uses a range of interpretative strategies to match the interests, needs and cultural requirements of our diverse audiences. These include:

- permanent, temporary and travelling exhibitions
- programs and activities delivered for a range of target audiences, for example, school students, family groups or academics
- programs and activities delivered via the Internet to users located around Australia and internationally
- print publishing including popular, education and scholarly publishing
- innovative and emerging technologies to enhance and enable interactive engagement.

Each of these methodologies and formats use media appropriate to their target audience.

4.5 Commitment to best practice and innovation

The Museum is committed to interpretative strategies which reflect international best practice. Trends in exhibition development, educational and public programming and print and electronic publishing are monitored to ensure methodologies and formats used for each target audience are of the highest standard possible.

In relation to the interpretation of Indigenous material, the Museum acknowledges the rights and responsibilities of Indigenous communities and ensures that it observes cultural protocols.

4.6 Presentation of information

The Museum strives to present the most accurate information in the most accessible ways possible to enable visitors and users to reach their own understanding of Australian history and society. This includes interpretive strategies which enable visitors and users to participate in debate and discussions about significant historical issues through access to experts and specialists.

4.7 Multidisciplinary approach

Interpretation strategies are developed using a multidisciplinary approach incorporating curatorial, education, publishing and public programs perspectives and designed to enhance the level of engagement between content and audience.

5. Definition of terms

Interpretation

The process of engaging with visitors and users to create understanding.

Interpretative strategies

A set of approaches (exhibitions, face-to-face interpretation by Visitor Services Hosts, schools programs, public programs, web and print-based material) using a variety of methodologies and formats appropriate to target audiences.

6. Definition of responsibilities

The Assistant Directors share responsibility for the implementation of this policy across the Museum.

7. References

Client Service Charter, National Museum of Australia, 2003

National Museum of Australia Act 1980

Strategic Plan 2007–2010, National Museum of Australia

8. Implementation

8.1 Coverage

Whole of Museum: exhibitions, programs, activities and operations

8.2 Other related policies

Audience development policy
Collections development policy
Communication policy
Cultural diversity policy
Education and learning policy
Outreach policy
Public programs policy
Publishing policy
Travelling and temporary exhibitions policy

8.3 Exclusions

None

8.4 Monitoring

Implementation of this policy is monitored regularly by the Executive.

This policy will be reviewed in August 2012.