

SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT

WORKSHOP 12 MARCH
2019

Significance defines the meanings and values of a cultural heritage item or collection through research and analysis, and by assessment against a standard set of criteria

Primary significance criteria

- Historic significance
- Artistic or Aesthetic significance
- Scientific or Research significance
- Social or Spiritual significance

These are the **primary criteria** that determine **why** **and how** an item or collection is significant.

Not all criteria need to apply. An item or collection may be significant under only one criterion.

Comparative criteria

- Provenance
- Rarity or representativeness
- Condition or completeness
- Interpretive capacity

The comparative criteria evaluate the **degree** of significance of a cultural heritage item or collection

Using significance assessment to build sustainable collections

Put the **comparative criteria** to work for you when

- Making acquisition choices
- Accepting or rejecting donations
- Deaccessioning from your collection

Does the object have a firm provenance?

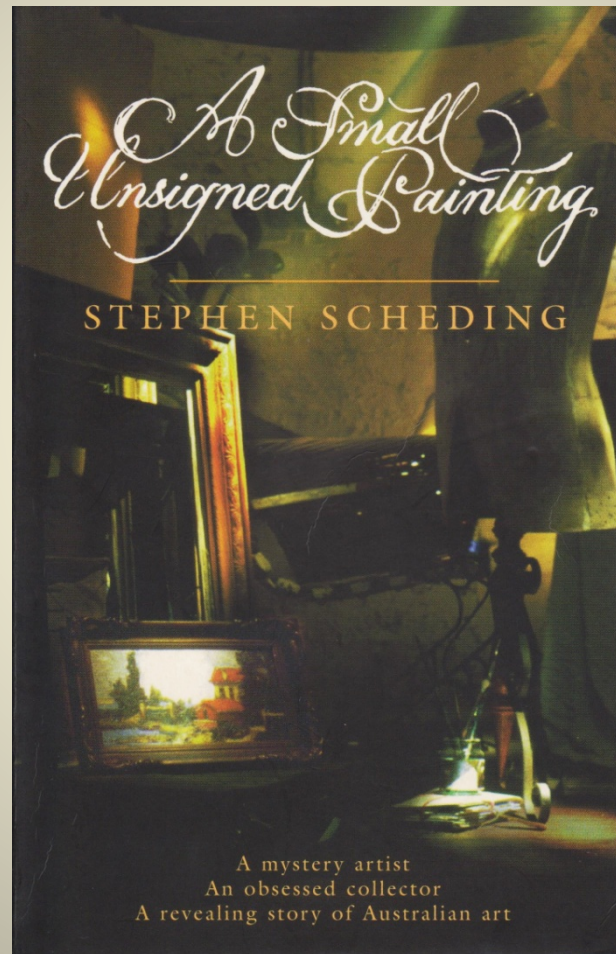
- A representative object with a firm provenance will be of greater significance than one without.
- It is also far more likely to have a higher degree of interpretive potential
- Establishing the provenance of an artwork is key to its value and reputation in the market

Julie Bishop's red shoes

Museum of Australian Democracy, Old Parliament House, Canberra



The complex process of tracing the provenance of a painting



The 'small unsigned painting' thought to be by Lloyd Rees, from
Stephen Scheduling, *A Small Unsigned Painting*



The boatshed painting, oil on plywood, 15 x 30.5 cm (after cleaning).

Tracey Moffat, *Something More*



Is it rare?

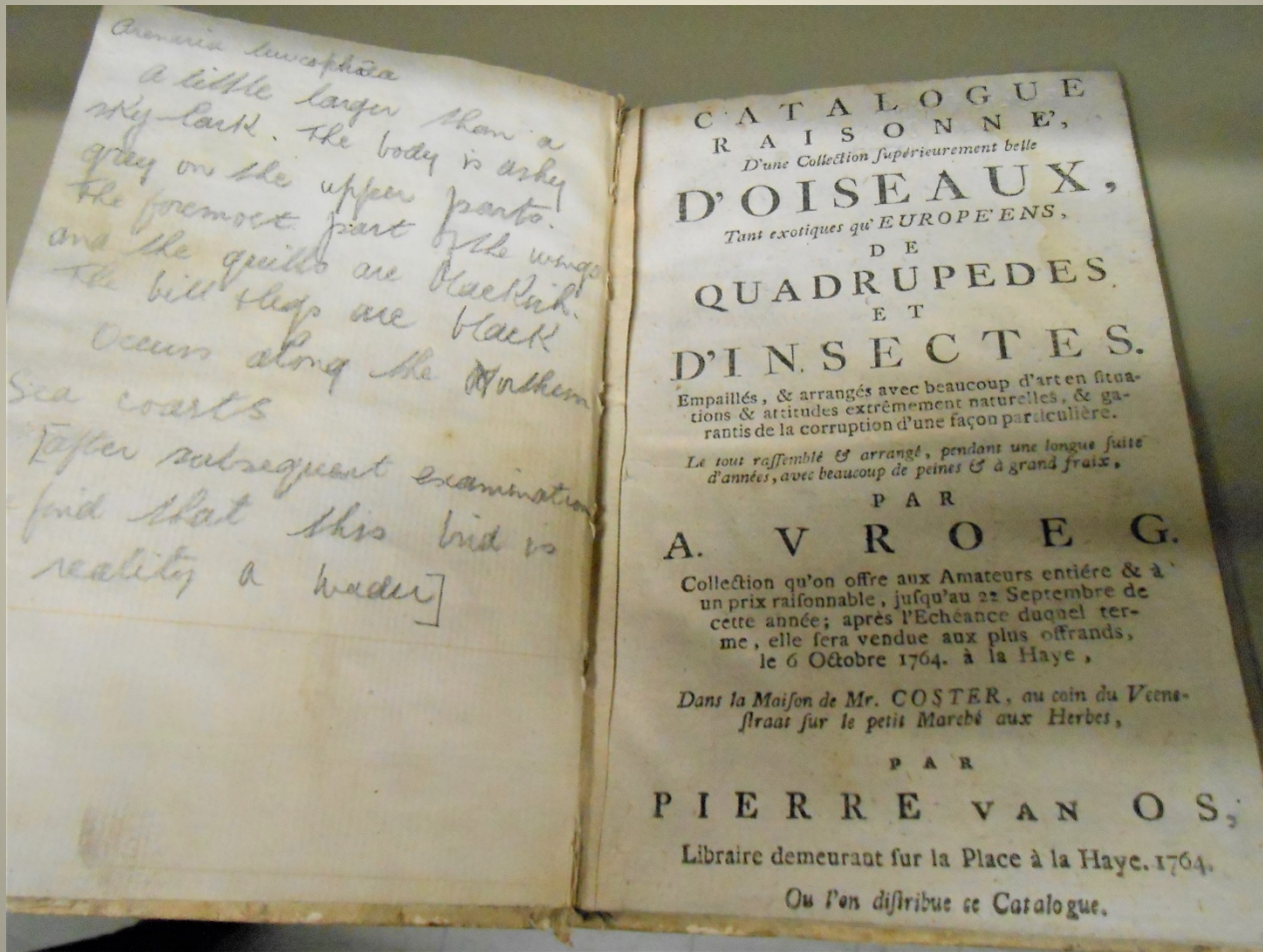
Is it a one-off item and can truly be described as 'unique'?

Or

Is it a once common object that is now hard to find?

Remember: objects can be both rare and representative.

Rare book, National Library of Australia



Giant fleece from 'Chris the Sheep' National Museum of Australia



Is it representative?

- Is an object an unusual or particularly fine example of its type?
- Is it typical or characteristic of its class?
- Is it particularly well documented for its class or group?

Water Carts

Yarrowonga-Mulwala Pioneer Museum and Close Foundry, Finley NSW



World War I fund-raising buttons



Representative items



Condition and Completeness

An item in good condition is generally more significant than one that is damaged or incomplete

UNLESS

The condition of the item is an integral part of its story.





DR. IVEN PAGE
DENTIST

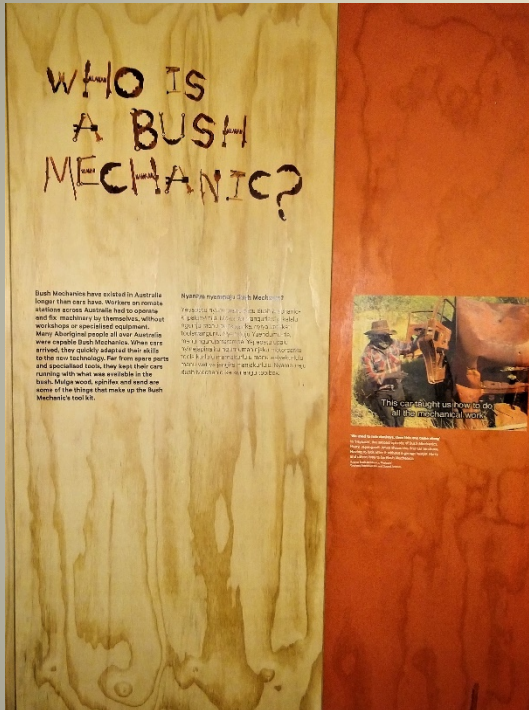
J.M. McFLACHLAN
Dentist

ROBBAN





Bush Mechanics car, National Museum of Australia



Menzies' Bentley



Deaccessioning can be a win-win situation

Careful deaccessioning can benefit collections in several ways

- It allows for better use of scarce resources – staff time, storage and exhibition space, and expenditure on climate control
- Deaccessioning an object or objects to collections where they are significant assists other museums and helps to build relationships



The Collection Deaccessioning Project carried out by the National Trust (WA) in 2007-08 went through three phases: once significance was assessed, 352 provenance objects were transferred to 57 museums in Western Australia, and another 197 unprovenanced objects went to 14 museums across Australia through a closed auction process. The remaining 6000 objects deaccessioned from the National Trust (WA) collections were sold in a public auction. All of the auction funds received were used to create an endowment for the ongoing management and care of the permanent collections.

Part of the old structure of the cross of St Matthew's Church, Windsor had ended up in Port Macquarie Historical Museum's collection. It was deaccessioned to Hawkesbury Regional Museum after a significance assessment and has been reunited with the other parts of the cross under an agreement between the two museums.



National Library of Australia

nla.pic-an6370127-v



1950s educational films and film boards
Corowa Federation Museum to Australian National Museum of
Education, University of Canberra



Deaccessioning a booklet

Manning Valley Historical Society to Museum of Australian Democracy, Old
Parliament House, Canberra



Electrical insulator 1920s

Close Foundry, Finley to Tamworth Powerstation Museum



Benefits of deaccessioning according to significance

- Frees up space and resources, leading to a more sustainable collection
- Collaborative relationships can be forged with other museums and collections when objects are deaccessioned to organisations and places where they have significance
- Collections become more coherent – leads to better interpretation