

# THE MAGIC LANTERN IN AUSTRALIA AND THE WORLD

## CANBERRA

4–6 September 2018

In September 2018, a total of 136 people attended the conference *The Magic Lantern in Australia and the World*, a collaboration between the Australian National University Research School of Humanities and the Arts, the Humanities Research Centre, and the National Film and Sound Archive, Australia, as part of the Australian Research Council Discovery Project *Heritage in the Limelight*.

Participants came from six countries and saw 34 papers and eight performances delivered. Themes covered by the papers included: Old and New Media; Exploration and Travel; Science, Instruction and Education; Moral Movements, Missionaries and Evangelism; and Biography. A highlight was an extended session at the National Film and Sound Archive where curators from eight different Australian institutions explored the magic lantern material in their collections. Keynote papers by Dr Vanessa Agnew from Germany and Associate Professor Jennifer Tucker from the USA provided an international context through their focuses on the magic lantern and political witnessing, and the magic lantern and scientific education.

An important part of the conference was a series of performances and creative works over three nights. These included the projection, in magic lanterns, of an algorithmically-coded and laser-cut chromatrope made by computer scientist Kieran Browne and engineer Miheng Dong, and a new set of dissolving view slides painted by contemporary artist Dr Waratah Lahy which beautifully portrayed dusk at her childhood home in Cooma, New South Wales.

Margaret Bergh and pianist Nancy Stewart from the USA presented a performance *Picture the Songs: The Life Model Illustrated Song in Australia*, which used Australia's online newspaper archive *Trove* to track the use of American illustrated song slides through Australian halls and theatres in the first part of the twentieth century. Dr Elisa deCourcy and Associate Professor Martyn Jolly, in collaboration with composer Alexander Hunter and actor Karen Vickery, presented a magic lantern performance *Five Scenes for a Modern Prometheus*, in celebration of the 200th anniversary of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It used a pair of dissolving view lanterns to project over 60 slides, including mechanical comic slides, hand-painted panoramic slides, and 20th-century scientific slides. The well-known theatre maker William Yang and the musician Dr Nicholas Ng performed *A Story Only I Can Tell* which thoughtfully reprised his 30-year career accompanying slide shows of his photographs with moving monologues.

Magic Lantern Society members who contributed to the conference included Margaret Bergh (USA), Joe Kember (UK), John Hyett (Australia), Martyn Jolly (Australia), Jennifer Tucker (Wesleyan University, USA) and Evelien Jonckheere (University of Antwerp).

*Heritage in the Limelight* website:  
<http://soad.cass.anu.edu.au/research/heritage-limelight>



Participants at the conclusion of the final evening of performances



Computer scientist Kieran Browne demonstrates his AI chromatrope



Dissolving view of her childhood home made by Dr Waratah Lahy from NSW



Dr Nicholas Ng accompanies William Yang



Dr Elisa deCourcy demonstrates the 21st-century chromatrope



Participants discuss the slides



Martyn Jolly discusses the event with Professor Ross Gibson