



Three members, of the Art Museum of Kangaroo Island Establishment Committee (AMKI), Deb Sleeman, Janine Mackintosh and Ria Byass, were able to attend the annual Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA) Conference in Alice Springs from the 13 – 17th May with the generous help of the AMaGA (SA) bursary, along with funds from the NT Government and the Department of Communication of the Arts. The purpose for your generous bursary included the opportunity for us to make more informed decisions about the development of our project.

We also applied for and received a grant from the Kangaroo Island Commissioner's Building Better Regions Fund for this purpose and along with ferry fares from Sealink were able to pay for a substantial proportion of our fares, accommodation and conference fees from assistance received.

The theme of the conference was *At the Centre; our people, our places our practices* and it therefore followed there was a large indigenous input into the conference.

There has been a deliberate decision by the Museums and Galleries sector for greater engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to decolonise the keeping places of culture and to create a strategy for all museums and galleries to follow (*First Peoples: A Roadmap for enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Museums and Galleries*) in the hope of slowly but steadily educating and influencing the community at large.

The quality and content of the indigenous speakers particularly made it quite clear that we, as the majority of decision makers in this sector, have a long way to go.

Speakers challenged, often emotionally and anecdotally, but also with great intellectual insight, the destructive nature of progress narratives and the need to decolonise the museum and gallery space.

Perceptions and decision making patterns were questioned and the need for understanding the deep truth of the land, the centrality of country to the narrative, the nature of community engagement and experience, and ways of knowing and learning content were put into contexts that enabled space for cooperation and truth telling, where the past is present and we listen.

We took everything offered, attending up to six keynote speeches and talks daily from museums and galleries - regional, urban and international. We learnt what a multi-faceted and exciting sector it is and the complexities of running these institutions and businesses so that they are viable into the future. And indeed, what is the relevance and function of a new gallery? Topics such as climate change, volunteers, how to have difficult conversations, the purpose of your museum/gallery, digitalisation of a collection, considering who your audience are... were all topics that engaged us and generated a lot of discussion.

We commented almost daily on how invaluable it was to have three of us to debrief daily and discuss and in fact make plans for the next day about who we needed to meet, interview and network with. It was very intense and both professionally and personally rewarding.

Through the many contacts made and conversations had over the week we collectively feel the need to reassess many previously unquestioned assumptions but feel this can only be a good thing if the Art Museum is to be a keeping place of art and culture on Kangaroo Island.

The learning curve was indeed very steep, but the conference afforded us the opportunity to make contact with aboriginal people from South Australia to enable the first step in an inclusive way forward.

Since returning from Alice Springs we have all consolidated our various notes, met together to discuss our points of view and insights to enable us to meet with the committee on the 7th June for an extraordinary meeting.

Thank you again for what was a wonderful opportunity to fast track our learning and contacts.