



International
Specialised
Skills
Institute

Italian Australian Foundation Inc.



MAKING MONEY:

Numismatic art, collections and
conservation

An International Specialised Skills Institute Fellowship.

CLAIRE ROWSON

Sponsored by The Italian Australian Foundation

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1. Acknowledgements

This Fellowship was made possible by the International Specialised Skills institute and the Italian Australian Foundation, for which the fellow is unspeakably grateful.

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The overarching aim of the ISS Institute is to support the development of a 'Better Skilled Australia'. The Institute does this via the provision of Fellowships that provide the opportunity for Australians to undertake international skills development and applied research that will have a positive impact on Australian industry and the broader community.

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The Fellow sincerely thanks the Italian Australian Foundation (previously known as the Italian Services Institute) for providing funding support for this Fellowship and to the ISS Institute. The Italian Australian Foundation was established, inter alia, to advance the education of Australian residents who are of Italian descent. The Fellowship provides the opportunity for successful Fellows to advance their skills and knowledge. The Italian Australian Foundation and ISS Institute work with the successful recipients upon their return to share and publicise the learnings and recommendations from their Fellowship investigation.

The Fellow would like to also acknowledge La Scuola dell'Arte della Medaglia (SAM) in Rome, their director Rosa Maria Villani, the faculty, other staff and students for being extremely welcoming, patient and generous with their time, skills and facilities.

Thanks also to Tom Hockenhull, Curator: Coins and Medals and Pippa Pearce, Senior Conservator at the British Museum(BM) for facilitating the Fellow's week long research within the coins and medals department at the British Museum. Special thanks also to Philip Atwood: Keeper of Coins and Medals and Henry Flynn: The Money and Medals Network. The Bank of England Museum and its staff are also acknowledged for facilitating a behind-the-scenes tour of their incredible collections.

Thanks to the Hand Engravers Association of Great Britain(HEAGB) for their continuing efforts in preserving and transferring the traditional trade skills of hand engravers and for facilitating the workshops attended by the fellow in February 2020. Particular thanks to engravers Angus McFadyen and Sarah Hobbs.

Finally the Fellow would like to acknowledge the support of the Perth Mint in the early stages of the Fellowship application and in providing the Fellow's decade long career in minting leading up to the Fellowship activities. The Fellow acknowledges and praises the hard work, specialist knowledge and impeccable craftsmanship of the factory workers, past and present that dedicate their lives to the excellence and endurance of that industry.

2. Executive Summary

Background

The international component of this Fellowship was conducted in January-February 2020 and included six weeks at La Scuola dell'Arte della Medaglia which is a school focusing on the metallic arts, particularly those associated with the numismatic design and fabrication of coins and medals. It is housed in the former Italian State Mint on via Principe Umberto in Rome and is supported by the continuing activities of Zecca d'Italia (the Italian State Mint). The Fellow attended full time skills based lessons including chalcographic engraving, direct cut steel die engraving, hard stone glyptic engraving and also art and design lessons in modelling and drawing from life.

The Fellow also spent two weeks in the United Kingdom, attending a two-day course with the Hand Engravers Association of Great Britain that focused on hand lettering in the engraving of decorative and fine metallic object surfaces. One week was also spent researching conservation issues affecting numismatic collections at the British Museum and in strategic conversations regarding their involvement with the British Art Medal Society and the Money and Medals specialist network. The final visit was with the Bank of England Museum in central London to similarly discuss the complex needs of such specialist collections.

The Fellow, Claire Rowson is both a conservator and numismatic fabricator having spent eight years working within the minting sector as an artist/engraver. Towards the end of her career in minting, she also began addressing the management and status of significant collections held by her then employer, the Perth Mint in Western Australia and is now looking to the broader issues of cultural conservation

in Australia. Claire is keenly interested in the rapidly shifting relationship between society and money and what that means for the future of numismatic collections in Australia.

Fellowship learnings

The Fellowship learnings included both tangible and intangible truths affecting the rare trades sector, the conservation discipline and the potential for greater synergies between both sectors that the Fellow is very proud to be involved with.

The tangible, skills based learnings included knowledge on materials and fabrication methods in a variety of metallic arts as well as honest criticism of the works produced by the Fellow throughout the six-week training period, focusing on areas for improvement upon return to her own practice.

The more intangible learnings included the reiteration of the great importance of cultural heritage collections and their stakeholders, including those who access and care for them. In particular, the experiences at the British Museum have equipped the Fellow with a strategy to establish a specialist network in Australia modeled after the Money and Medals Network, facilitated by the British Museum. The MMN provides training, education and resources to organisational and private owners of significant numismatic collections in the United Kingdom and facilitates engagement between the silos of government collecting institutions, the commercial and corporate environment of modern mints, the community or academia led numismatic communities and other broader societal groups.

Personal, professional and sectoral impact

The outcomes of the Fellowship have had implications at the personal, professional and sectoral levels in the following ways:

Personal: The Fellow appreciated the opportunity to take a pause from professional working life to learn traditional craft skills at the pace of which such activities necessitate. Working in Italy has instilled a particular sense of craftsmanship in the Fellow, and the concept of *lavoro ben fatto* or 'work well done' is a prevailing attitude that will serve the Fellow in their art and conservation practice going forward.

Professional: At the professional level, the Fellowship has already provided Claire with an opportunity to showcase her skills as a medallic artist with her first commission of an art medal by the AICCM. Claire has commenced the design phase in collaboration with that organisation and will draw on the skills acquired through the Fellowship to deliver that outcome. Claire will use this experience as a springboard to establish an ongoing practice as a medallic engraver and artist in Australia.

Sectoral: Claire plans to establish a similar Money and Medals Network for Australia, using the opportunity to meet with and discuss her ideas with professionals at the British Museum. They have kindly provided resources and consultation to advise her on the practicalities of establishing and sustaining such an endeavor. Finally, Claire hopes to use her experiences on the ISSI Fellowship to continue the dialogue on rare trades preservation in Australia and the interdisciplinary opportunities afforded by her backgrounds in both an artisanal trade and cultural materials conservation.

Recommendations/Considerations

- » A specialist network such as the MMN would serve to activate numismatic collections, leading to increased preservation outcomes and encouraging dialogue on the status of physical currency, particularly in the face of threats bought about by a gradual shift towards cashless societies globally.
- » Rare trades practitioners, including conservators as trade specialists are best served to advocate for the issues affecting their sector as a collective rather than taking an individualistic approach.
- » Similarly, the nature of many rare trades practitioners to work in isolation and be approaching retirement age in a broad sense, have much to garner from increased engagement with the conservation discipline. Conservation training with its heightened emphasis on soft skills and intangible cultural heritage is equipping emerging professionals with the ability to identify the importance of cultural significance and to advocate for preservation outcomes.
- » More research is needed to disprove individualistic and perception based myths surrounding rare trades preservation such as 'young people aren't interested in working in traditional crafts'. Such misconceptions encourage barriers to the intergenerational engagement that preservation will depend upon.
- » The government should develop cultural policy especially with regards to tangible and intangible cultural heritage preservation, to ensure the longevity of collections and the transference of traditional skills, lest these talents and the material relics of such craft skills be lost to Australian society forever.

3. Fellowship Background

Fellowship context

The aims of this Fellowship were twofold: promoting the preservation of the rare trade skills associated with the minting industry in Australia and to advocate for the conservation not only of the material culture of that industry but also numismatic materials in collections in a broader sense. The rare trade skills of that industry include but are not limited to:

- » Hand engraving in steel and precious metals
- » Bas relief sculpture in plaster and wax
- » Art and design for the numismatic context
- » Tool making and
- » Assaying

Materials that make up the numismatic collections held by mints and other GLAM sector entities include:

- » Coins, banknotes, medals, tokens and badges
- » Industrial heritage machinery and ephemera
- » Two dimensional artworks on paper and photographs
- » Three dimensional artworks in plaster, silicone and other materials
- » Cash registers and other accounting ephemera
- » Built heritage and many more

Now is a critical time for the minting industry and numismatists alike as physical currency becomes less and less popular with both collectors and citizens in the increasingly cashless societies of the 21st Century. With the heritage and rare trades sectors facing threats in a general way, this niche pocket of specialist knowledge is also at risk from a craft skills shortage and aging experts.

Similarly, the significant numismatic collections held within the Nation's mints and collecting institutions, as well as in private guardianship would benefit from specialist advice on the care and conservation of numismatic materials. Activating these collections from an educational and public programming perspective could help to increase the appreciation for physical currency at a significant time of change for society regarding the ways we interact with money.

Fellowship methodology

The first visit of the Fellowship was to SAM in Rome. The day-to-day lessons weren't determined before the Fellow arrived and the first week was spent in informal orientation and introductory lessons in the range of skills taught at SAM. Based on that first week, an itinerary was finalised and the Fellow attended the selected classes from 8:30-7:00pm, Monday to Friday. Lessons included wax modelling, modelling and drawing from live models, engraving lessons in chalcographic 2D engraving and direct cut steel engraving with hammer and chisel. The Fellow also took a weekly lesson in glyptic engraving in hard stone and was able to observe some restoration workshops on the plaster and metallic objects that make up the majority of the collections at SAM.

In London, the Fellow participated in a two-day engraving workshop with the Hand Engravers Association of Great Britain. The first day was an introduction to selecting and sharpening tools and selecting materials. The second day had a focus on hand lettering. This was a good supplement to the six weeks already undertaken in Italy as it constituted a different application of engraving methods, to produce surface details on fine metal objects, plaques and trophies; quite different to the numismatic application witnessed in Italy. It was also valuable to reiterate the same lessons in the Fellow's native language but also to see a variety of approaches across international contexts and working practices. Talking through materials more widely available outside of continental Europe was also beneficial and this will help the Fellow to more easily establish a practice upon returning to Australia.

The final phase was professional visits to both the British Museum and the Bank of England Museum, both in London. The Fellow spent several days studying medals from the British Art Medal Society (BAMS) collections at the BM and also working with the conservation department on their treasure program which involves the conservation process of thousands of archeological coin-hoard finds annually. The Fellow also spoke at length with Philip Attwood: The Keeper of Coins and Medals at the BM about his involvement as the President of BAMS and also his involvement with the International Art Medal Society (FIDEM). The other key interview at the BM was with Henry Flynn who facilitates the Money and Medals Network, about the program's suitability for an Australian context.

Fellowship period

The Fellow completed the international component of the fellowship from January-March 2020. Six weeks were spent in Rome at SAM and the final two weeks were spent working with the Hand Engravers Association of Great Britain and the British Museum in London.

Fellow biography

Claire Rowson is an emerging conservator in the fields of numismatic and industrial heritage conservation. A Western Australian trained numismatic artist with more than eight years of technical fabrication within the minting industry, Claire has recently transitioned her professional roles to include the management of cultural heritage collections. Having completed her Masters in Cultural Materials Conservation at the University of Melbourne, Claire is one of the nation's leading experts in the field of numismatic conservation and a fierce advocate for the preservation of rare trades and Western Australia's unique industrial and manufacturing heritage.

Abbreviations

AICCM	Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material
BM	The British Museum
BAMS	British Art Medal Society
CCA	Collections Council Australia
FIDEM	Fédération Internationale de la Médaille d'Art (International Art Medal Federation)
GLAM	Galleries, libraries, archives, museums: broadly the cultural collecting institutions in Western societies.
HEAGB	Hand Engravers Association of Great Britain
IAF	Italian Australian Foundation
ISSI	International Specialised Skills Institute
SAM	La Scuola dell'Arte Della Medaglia
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



La Scuola dell'Arte della Medaglia

4. Fellowship Learnings

The future of rare trades and skills transference: a conservation issue

UNESCO deems ‘the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts’ as intangible cultural heritage and acknowledge the intergenerational implications with conservation stating ‘the importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next’ (2018).

Conservators as a discipline understand these concerns acutely. Today more than ever, the discipline of conservation is becoming more diverse, contextually aware and intertwined with efforts to preserve the more intangible aspects of culture rather than the purely material focused activities of artifact restoration. This paradigm shift towards becoming a more academic discipline has meant that training to be a conservator in the 21st century grapples with the difficulties of simultaneously encompassing the past, present and future and deep considerations of what constitutes culture itself. Materials conservation is a trade in its own right. However, many undergraduate and masters courses in the discipline balance an overview of the traditional bench skills and working materials of classical restoration with the soft skills required to operate in the professional and often times, corporate environments of modern museums and other collecting institutions. This includes public speaking, digital marketing, social media content generation and management, the art of grant applications and acquittal amongst others.

The Fellow witnessed SAM working closely with other training providers in Italy including several design schools in Milan and the Istituto Superiore per la

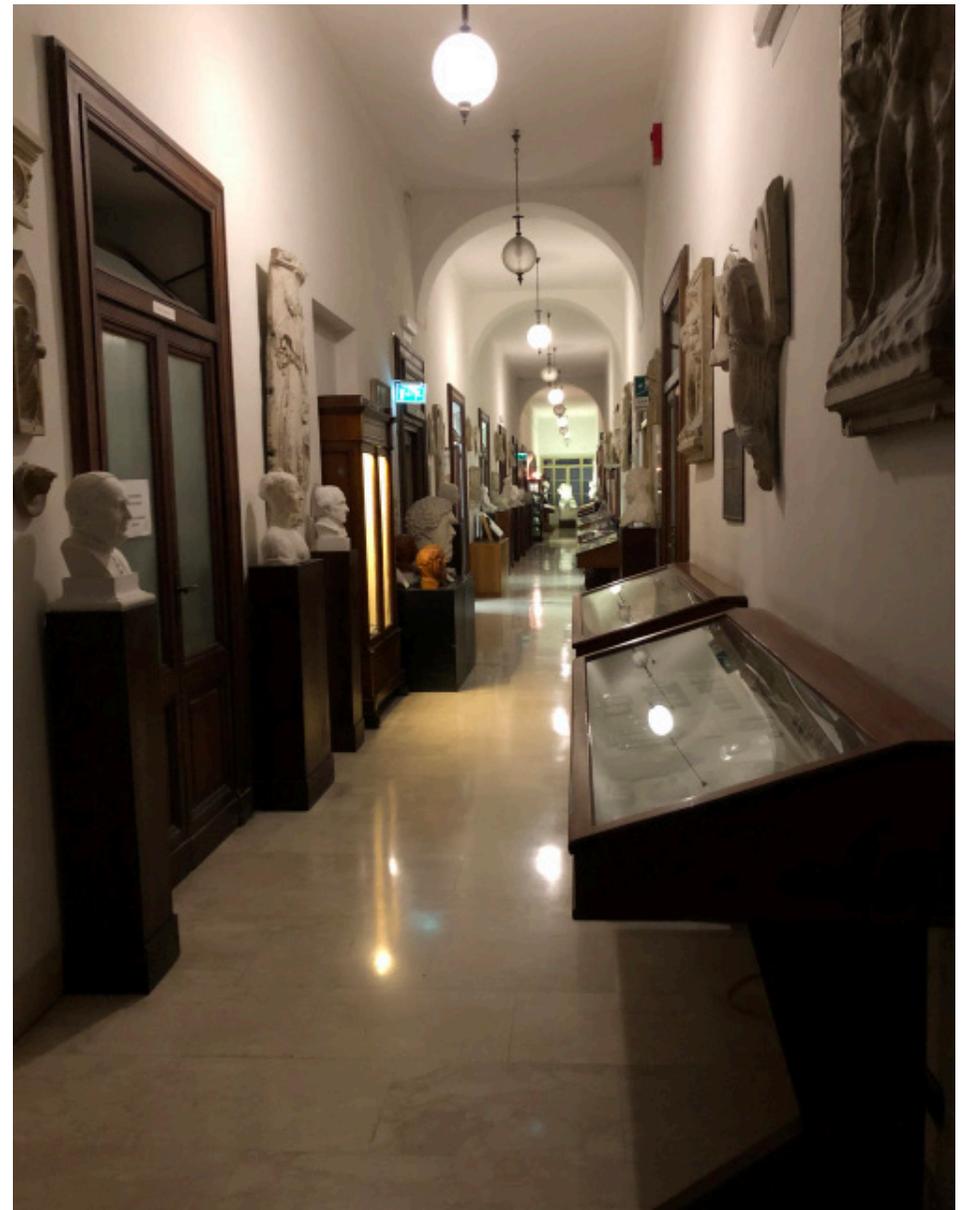
Conservazione ed il Restauro in Rome, which is the Italian state training provider for art conservation. Conservation practice is part of the curriculum at SAM and students are taught to clean and repair plaster cast sculptures and other materials that make up their collections. SAM alumni go on to work in a multitude of roles in a variety of creative industries, including luxury manufacturing, film and television, gold and silversmithing, conservation and restoration and many more. This marriage of craft skills and conservation is an approach that could be mutually beneficial to both sectors in Australia. Conservators in Australia have self-identified that they ‘recognise that they are under-skilled when considering appropriate conservation treatments of heritage objects’ (Dunn, Sloggett and Draayers 2018). Emerging conservators would benefit greatly from acquiring the skills of a wide variety of other trades, from built heritage to gilding and many more. As Dunn, Sloggett and Draayers observed in their recently published research that included a conservation discipline led survey on skills gaps in Australia, ‘traditional trade skills are part of the conservation ecosystem that sits beside the expertise held by conservators’.

Collections critical in skills education

As people and practitioners who possess rare trade skills age and retire, the fabric of their labors; the objects and artworks that make up collections in the GLAM sector and elsewhere increase in this ‘intangible value’. Whilst oral histories and learning from experts directly is invaluable, interrogating objects is also possible. The first-year curriculum at SAM focuses on studying and replicating master works, in a very classical art training model. Students work by copying directly from the medals and other objects in the SAM collections before progressing in second

and third years to designing original artwork and bas relief models that go on to be fabricated into original medallions. As the Fellow's lessons were introductory only due to the short time period of the Fellowship visit, the engraving lessons were largely spent copying work in this way. Object based learning in this international context was also useful to overcome the language barrier experienced. All of these factors reiterated the critical status of collections within a broader consideration of rare trades education to the Fellow. Well preserved collections of art and design can ultimately provide access to the intangible knowledge of their makers for future artists and craftspeople.

Although the importance of collections is widely acknowledged in Australia, they face risks to their preservation and ongoing community access. Within the document Significance 2.0 for example, which provides a keystone significance assessment method for the heritage and conservation sector, it states, 'Australian collections are the memory bank of the nation and a key to its future'. The organisation that published this document, the Collections Council of Australia (CCA) was a national venture to ensure stability and sustainability for the collections sector and to advise the GLAM sector nationally on preservation and access needs within collections. That organisation ceased in 2010 due to government funding withdrawal. As collections face ever-evolving situations in society, as does culture more broadly, Australia no longer has a government led and initiated strategy or peak-body organisation dedicated to cultural heritage collection care and preservation. Furthermore, despite the immense contribution of the broader cultural and creative industry sector to the Australian GDP, Australia still has no formal national policy for the cultural sector (Benton 2019). Given the recent decimation to that sector since the Fellow returned to Australia in March 2020 due to the global pandemic caused by the spread of the Covid-19 virus, these threats to collections and the broader GLAM sector continue to increase exponentially.



Collection displays at SAM



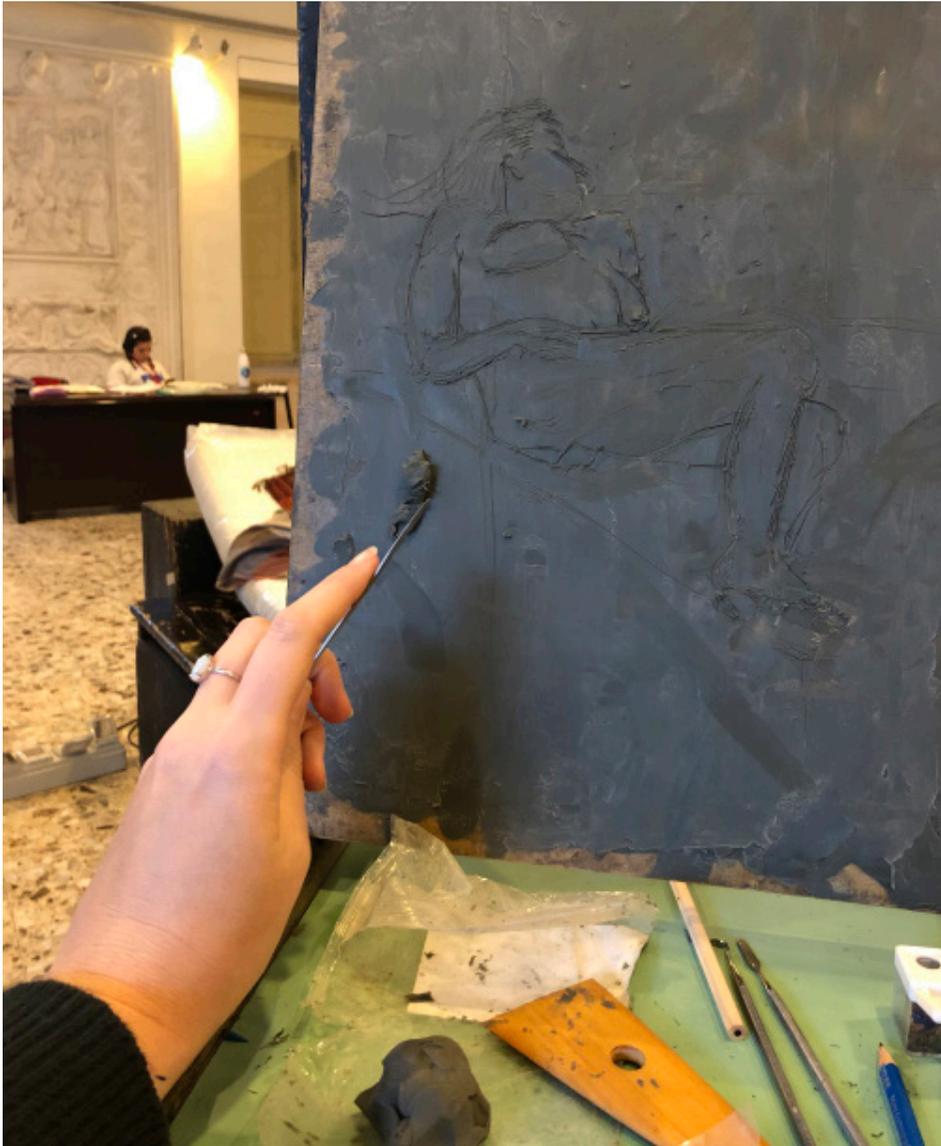
Displays of numismatic objects at Ars Metallica



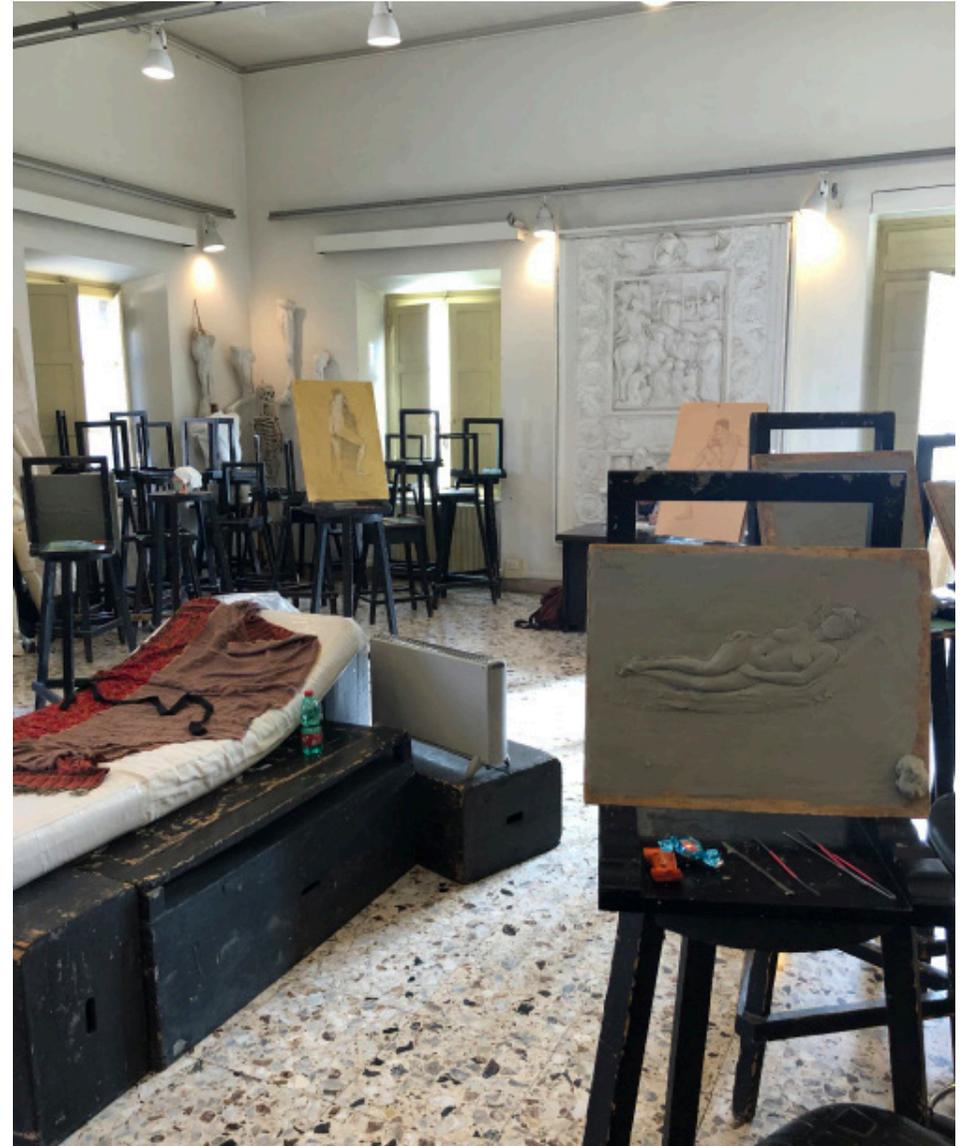
Life drawing at SAM



Live drawing at SAM showing students work



Life modelling at SAM



Life modelling at SAM



Chalcographic engraving lesson at SAM



The fellow's chalcographic work at SAM



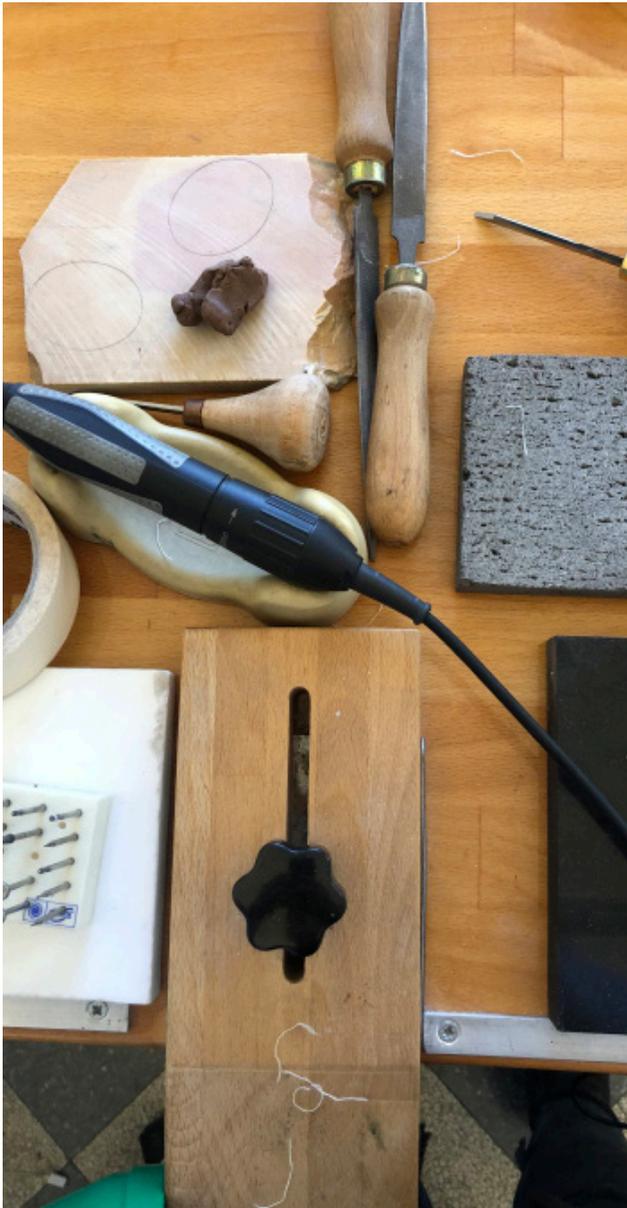
Operating the printing press at SAM



Wax modelling lesson at SAM



The Fellow in a wax modelling lesson at SAM



Left: Tools of glyptic, hard stone engraving at SAM

Middle: Unworked stone pieces at SAM

Top right: The beginning of glyptic engraving lessons

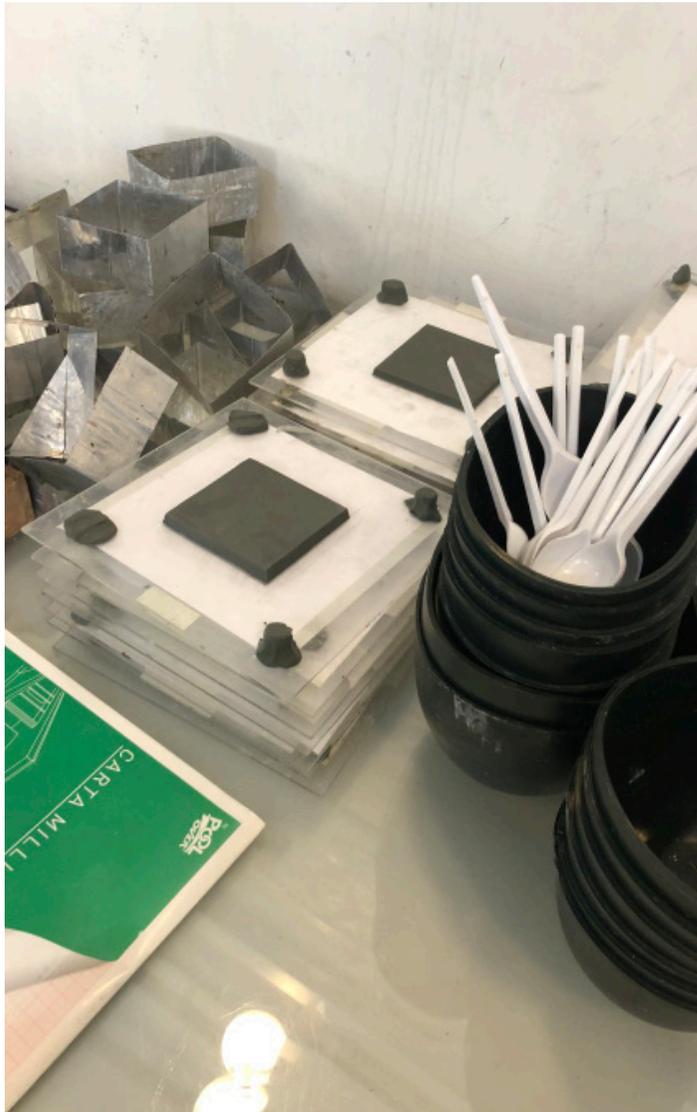
Bottom right: The Fellow's finished glyptic work at SAM



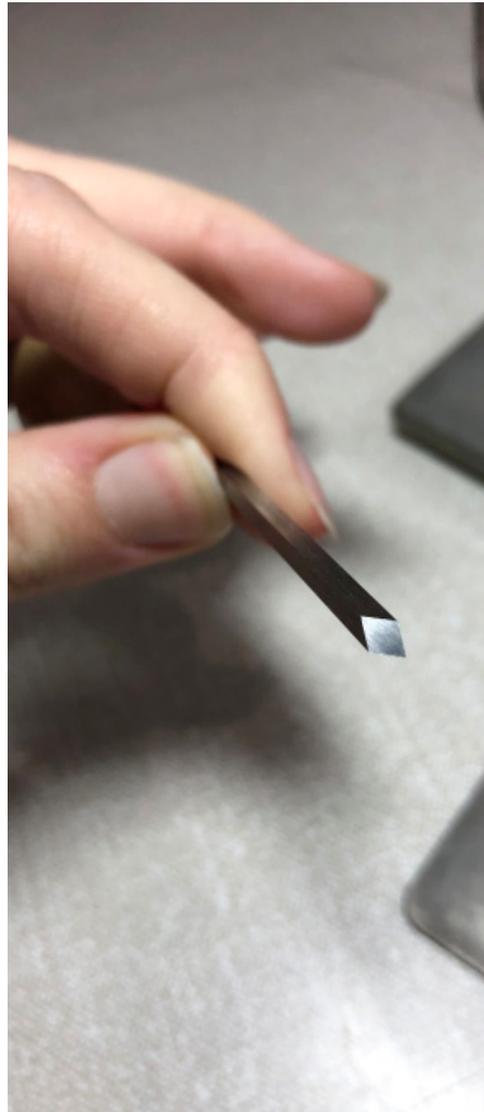
Left: Learning preparation methods of the chisels for direct cut steel engraving

Middle: Copying the master work of Pisanello

Right: The Fellow's engraving work at six weeks



Experiencing a casting workshop at SAM



Learning to sharpen a square graver with the Hand Engravers Association of GB



Visual aid for learning to sharpen gravers



Studying Australian medals at the BM



Numismatic displays at the Bank of England Museum

5. Personal, professional and sectoral impact

Personal:

Experiencing international contexts

The Italian concept of *lavoro ben fatto* translates to ‘work, well done’ but more broadly, ‘doing things well because that’s how they should be done’ (Baggio and Moretti, 2019). It is a pervasive cultural ethos in that country and Italy is indeed renowned for its export of luxury manufactured goods, from cars and industrialised precision machinery to food, fashion and much more. As Italian sociologist and author Vincenzo Moretti outlines in his *Il Manifesto del Lavoro Ben Fatto*, ‘It’s a matter of strong commitment, your head is where your hand is, your heart is where your head is’ (2015). This is particularly applicable in the rare/ heritage trades sector that lauds a holy trinity of head, heart and hands. *Lavoro ben fatto* is indeed a serious commitment to attention-to-detail and connoisseurship and producing work within such a hyper-critical environment whilst striving for quality in technical and aesthetic terms was an invaluable experience for the Fellow. Moretti also states the seemingly brutal concept of ‘nearly good, is not good’ and the faculty and students of SAM clearly operated under this modus, discussing and revising designs until multiple parties were satisfied that the design was optimised; the best manifestation it could possibly be. This contradicted some of the Fellow’s experiences working as a rare trade practitioner within a commercial context in Australia, where such considerations of design optimisation give way to more pressing production deadlines.

As well as this unwavering commitment to design quality, the other personal benefits apparent to the Fellow include the simple luxury of spending two months away from the professional workplace to attend art classes, at a pace that is required to truly

support this type of kinesthetic learning. The unfortunate truth about craft skill education is that there is no fast-track, abridged, weekend-course methodology to teach them and repetitive practice is the only way to increase muscle memory, refine motor control and to eventually achieve any kind of fluidity and mastery. Lastly, enhancing soft skills in an international context is invaluable and depending on the industry, those opportunities seemingly diminish as individuals enter the workforce and go about the business of everyday life. The ability to learn basic language skills, communicate effectively and to generally approach others from different cultural contexts and backgrounds is a value-added skill as a modern professional in a highly-globalised world.

Professional:

Providing a platform to debut the Fellow’s skills as an artist

Through the interest surrounding this Fellowship, the Fellow has already been approached with a commission as a medallist artist. The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) has commissioned the Fellow to make a lifetime achievement medal that they award sporadically for excellence in the field of cultural conservation. Through the AICCM’s activities in running seminars, workshops and conferences, as well as publishing bulletins and newsletters, this is a good platform for Claire to initially showcase her skills in medal fabrication, with some continuity and longevity as it is an ongoing prize. This opportunity is invaluable as an artist but also in self-promotion as a conservator within the professional conservation community of Australia and New Zealand.

Networking in specialist disciplines is also difficult in geographically and ideologically isolated Australia. Spending time with the Hand Engravers Association of Great Britain has connected the Fellow to that organisation's associates in Australia. Time spent at the British Museum has also connected the Fellow to the Australian FIDEM delegates who are all accomplished medallic artists in their own right. The Fellowship has greatly expanded Claire's professional networks in Australia and internationally.

Sectoral:

Activating numismatic collections in Australia: a money and medals specialist network

People interact with numismatic objects sometimes on a daily basis. Although society's attitudes towards physical currency are changing rapidly, certain demographics still rely on cash transactions and remain keenly interested in using but also studying and collecting circulation coinage and bank notes. Countless individuals in Australia will also be in possession of some distant family member's decimal and pre-decimal coin collections. The other wide spread engagement with numismatic objects in Australia is of course in our reverence of ANZAC day and the ritual display of military medals, both personal and familial. Furthermore, many people would have been awarded a medal for sporting or academic achievements at some point in their life. These objects and more in the world of numismatica embody rich stories of social history, practice and the very human rites of celebrating, remembering and commemorating.

Numismatic collections held in the GLAM sector and elsewhere in Australia generally suffer from a lack of specialist attention. The two operating mints in Australia have until recently, had little engagement with the museum sector despite their significant numismatic holdings. The Sydney and Melbourne Mints closed in the early to mid-twentieth century at a time of different contextual approaches to cultural heritage and little is known of the outcome of their moveable heritage

collections. Similarly, very few museums in Australia employ numismatic specialist professionals, relying on numismatists in a voluntary capacity. This is all very understandable in a highly plural professional sector such as cultural collections. The Money and Medals Network facilitated by the British Museum is an innovative approach to bridge this gap between the professional museum sector and the largely voluntary and community led numismatic specialist research and collecting discipline. Henry Flynn who is the coordinator of the network, provided the Fellow with a template questionnaire to approach stakeholders, advice on best practices for funding and financial sustainability and generally agreed that it would be a worthwhile venture to pursue in the Australian context. This will become an ongoing project for Claire, encompassing her background in minting, networks in numismatics and vocation as a cultural conservator.

6. Recommendations and Considerations

- » A specialist network existing as a bridge between the GLAM sector and the numismatic specialist discipline, such as the Money and Medals Network in the United Kingdom would greatly benefit Australian stakeholders without having to draw from an already under resourced government sector. A conservation professional with broad knowledge of that sector, as well as a specialist in the numismatic discipline, such as the Fellow, is a good candidate to facilitate that network.
- » Rare trades practitioners are probably best served to advocate as a collective rather than taking an individualistic approach. Schools or training programs for specialist skills are probably non-sustainable in the current cultural and economic landscape in Australia. Just as SAM adapted in the 1970s to teach a wider range of metallic arts, using its minting heritage as a spring board, interdisciplinary rare trades practitioners should work together to raise awareness of the bigger picture issues affecting the sector and in practical ways to share resources, facilities and complimentary soft skills.
- » In a similar way, established rare trades practitioners, experts and ageing master artisans should work closely with emerging artists and professionals, especially in the conservation discipline to encourage an intergenerational exchange of ideas, skills and practices. Emerging conservators would benefit immensely from the skills and knowledge of master craftspeople and vice versa regarding the soft skills and expertise in interconnectivity that is very much a part of being an emerging professional, in any discipline today.
- » Quantitative and qualitative research such as that conducted recently by ISSI and AICCM into the reality of threats to rare trades versus societal perceptions is important to inform approaches. Too often it is said that ‘young people aren’t interested in working with their hands’, ‘young people aren’t interested in working hard’ or ‘young people just want to work with computers’. These are all perceptions, that do not acknowledge the difficulties associated with sourcing and resourcing apprenticeships in Australia, and the myriad difficulties associated with connecting potential training providers with capable, job seeking people, young and old alike. These statements contain little respect for young people who, at the start of their working lives are rightfully interested in pursuing meaningful and sustainable employment pathways, of which heritage trade skills are potentially hidden or altogether excluded. Fostering a mutually respectful intergenerational environment is the best way to increase engagement in direct relationships such as those between trainers and trainees, but also in broader, societal attitudes towards rare trades.
- » Develop cultural policy in Australia and consider the reinstatement of a government led venture to support the collection landscape in Australia, to include both the delineated state organizations as well as the non-museum, private sector.

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Published by International Specialised Skills Institute, Melbourne | www.issinstitute.org.au

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