



ROCKING HORSES, CAROUSEL RESTORATION AND WOOD CARVING

lessons from the USA

An International Specialised Skills Institute
Fellowship.

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1. Acknowledgements

The Fellow would like to thank the following individuals and organisations who generously gave their time and their expertise to assist, advise and guide her throughout her George Alexander Foundation Fellowship.

Awarding Body – International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)

The ISS Institute plays a pivotal role in creating value and opportunity, encouraging new thinking and early adoption of ideas and practice by investing in individuals.

The overarching aim of the ISS Institute is to support the development of a “Smarter 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.

The International Specialised Skills Institute was founded 28 years ago, by Sir James Gobbo AC, CVO, QC, and former Governor of Victoria, who had a vision of building a community of industry specialists who would lead the up-skilling of the Australian workforce. The Fellowship Program builds shared learning, leadership and innovation across the broad range of industry sectors worked with. Fellows are supported to disseminate learning's and ideas, facilitate change and advocate for best practice through the sharing of their Fellowship learning's with peers, colleagues, government, industry and community.

Since its establishment 28 years ago, ISS Institute has supported over 450 Fellows to undertake research across a wide range of sectors which in turn has

led to positive change, the adoption of best practice approaches and new ways of working in Australia.

The Fellowship Programs are led by investment partners and designed in a manner which ensures that the needs and goals desired by the partners are achieved. ISS Institute works closely to develop a Fellowship Program that meets key industry priorities, thus ensuring that the investment made will have lasting impact.

For further information on ISS Institute Fellows, refer to www.issinstitute.org.au

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The Fellow sincerely thanks The George Alexander Foundation for providing funding support for the ISS Institute and for this Fellowship. In 1972, George Alexander AM (1910 - 2008) set up an independent philanthropic Foundation as a way of sharing his wealth and giving back to the community. Today, the main focus of The George Alexander Foundation is access to education for promising young people, particularly students with financial need and those from rural and remote areas.

The George Alexander Foundation (GAF) Scholarship and Fellowship Programs form the core of the foundation's work, operating in partnership with major tertiary institutions, while our Fellowships and other Education grants provide a variety of other unique and challenging educational experiences. George Alexander believed in the notion of 'planting seeds and hoping they grow into pretty big trees'. The programs supported by the Foundation endeavour to support this ideal and as GAF students graduate and go on to contribute to the community, George's legacy and spirit lives on through their achievements. George Alexander came to Australia as a child migrant, and went on to become a mechanic, an entrepreneur and a businessman and later, a generous philanthropist, who held that you do not own the possessions you have, 'you're just minding them'. This philosophy guided him to give during his lifetime and to hope that through his example, he might inspire others to do the same.

2. Executive Summary

I undertook this Fellowship to extend on my wood carving knowledge, paying particular attention to my skills in fine detailed carving, and technical design for the creation of three-dimensional works. Additionally, I wanted hands-on experience learning carousel restoration and traditional painting techniques. I travelled to America, visiting North Carolina, South Carolina and Philadelphia to seek expert guidance. I am pleased to say that I was successful in my learning goal and acquired further skills in relation to social media campaigning and other avenues of income for small creative businesses.

I believe that this Fellowship has had an enormously positive impact on my professional practice. I have implemented my new knowledge and practical skills in carving to apply finer detail to my work. I have already begun sharing my new skills through carving demonstrations at events such as the Lost Trades Fair in Kyneton and I have presented my work and talked about my time in America, my Fellowship, findings and learnt skills to the Artisans Guild of Australia. I have implemented many new teaching and practical techniques into my rocking horse classes (I currently run 4 per year) and I plan to run a 1-day introduction to carving class in the near future.

I have also taken on the restoration of an old carousel horse. Although the restoration is still in the planning stages, I am doing so with new planning skills and a new perspective. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, I have gained a new confidence that with perseverance I can be an industry leader here in Australia as I hope to work towards a bigger picture focus; preserving heritage trades and supporting Australian artisans and trades to further educate and preserve our skills.



Image 1 (left): The old carousel horse as it came to me. It has been in this family for 120 + years.



Image 2 (right): The salvageable parts of the horse. All 4 legs had rot as it was stored on wet ground and were unsalvageable. The back of the horse was missing, along with several other small parts.

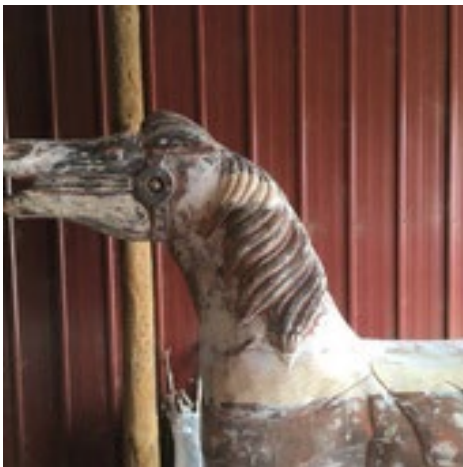


Image 3: Note the new carving of the mane (and parts of the saddle) – blended in to match the original work. This work was made possible by skills learnt through my Fellowship.



Image 4: The new legs, hand carved to match the original legs. In a carousel horse the weight is supported by a central metal pole through the horses belly and the legs have no structural/weight bearing strength in them. As this was being converted into a rocking horse I had to adapt the original attachment method to make sure the legs could bear the weight of both horse and rider.

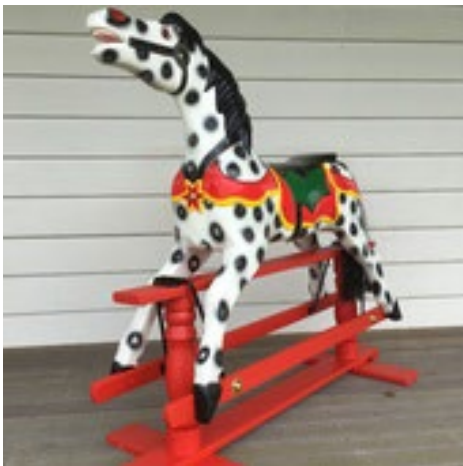


Image 5 (left): The finished carousel horse, painted to match its second most recent layer of paint (there were over 20 layers), as per client request and to match the application of that paint layer. Note the small amounts of gold leaf work along the black tack – another skill made possible by my Fellowship.

3. Fellowship Background

I grew up on a farm on the Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, where I loved making anything and everything. At a young age I developed a love for working with natural materials and in particular wood. Once I completed high school I went on to Study Furniture Design and Construction at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. This really cemented my love of timber, but I was still looking for something a little different. I moved to Sydney where I was accepted into the Prop Making and Scenic Art (BA) at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, a very demanding course that took at least 72 hours per week. I loved it there and learnt everything from polystyrene carving through to electronics. However, I still most loved working with natural materials.

For my masters work in 3rd year, I decided to research and make a carved timber rocking horse - it was the first time I had carved timber and I loved it. After graduating I worked for one and a half years in the industry as a Scenic Artist for FOX Films and Opera Australia, Head of Props for a production by The Sydney Opera House and as the Saddle Maker for the Royal National Theatre in London for War Horse. During this time, I was working and saving money so that I could set up my own workshop and pursue carving and restoring rocking horses for a living.

To my knowledge, I am the only full-time rocking horse maker using hand carving techniques in Australia. In addition to designing and creating hand carved pieces, I run private classes and present wood carving demonstrations. The main purpose of my Fellowship was to expand upon my finer traditional wood carving skills, allowing me to create more detailed and intricate work. Another goal was to learn the traditional painting and restoration techniques applied to carousel animals.

I believe that developing these specialized skills and techniques will assist in creating sustainability within the Australian wood carving industry through the transfer of knowledge. I am particularly passionate about transferring such knowledge to women, whom often seek my expertise. Traditionally, the Australian woodworking trade has been a male dominated domain. As a woman producing high quality hand-carved pieces, I hope to rectify the notion that woodworking is a 'male skill set'. Unfortunately, I have many women tell me of the poor reception women have encountered when seeking traditional woodworking education. I am proud to work with and know many kind and generous male woodworkers and I do believe that slowly the public perception is changing with the new generations.

Obtaining and passing on these skills is also very important for the restoration of the many aging and historic carousels here in Australia. Highly specialized restorative work will be required in order to save them from the scrap heap and share the cultural history and skill behind these works of art with future generations.

These pictures are an example of my custom hand carved rocking horses. As you can see their paint work is very different to that of other rocking horse, I pride myself on working towards a realistic and natural paint finish, I also apply this to the shape and carving of the horse.



Black (note to achieve a realistic 'black' with depth I start with a deep red and overlay 5 shades of brown, each getting darker until the final coat is a 'mist' of black. When the light hits this paintwork there is depth and warmth. This could not be achieved with just a straight black paint.



4. Fellowship learning

Skills Enhancement

To improve my finer wood carving detail, I chose to visit Mary May in South Carolina. Mary May is a world-renowned wood carver who often carves highly detailed traditional pieces for the restoration of historical American buildings. Mary also runs an on-line wood carving school, a business model I find very interesting.

Mary has a large catalogue of work, covering a lot of styles, techniques and applications. I chose to seek her knowledge over another rocking horse maker for this reason. Traditionally, American carousels and woodcarving in general was done by immigrants from different parts of Europe and the UK, each bringing a different style and technique to their work. When a carousel was commissioned, the workers were mostly given free rein as to the style and decoration of the animals they carved. This would result in multiple examples of different traditional carving approaches being evident on a single carousel. In turn, American carvers today tend to lend from several different influences within their approach.

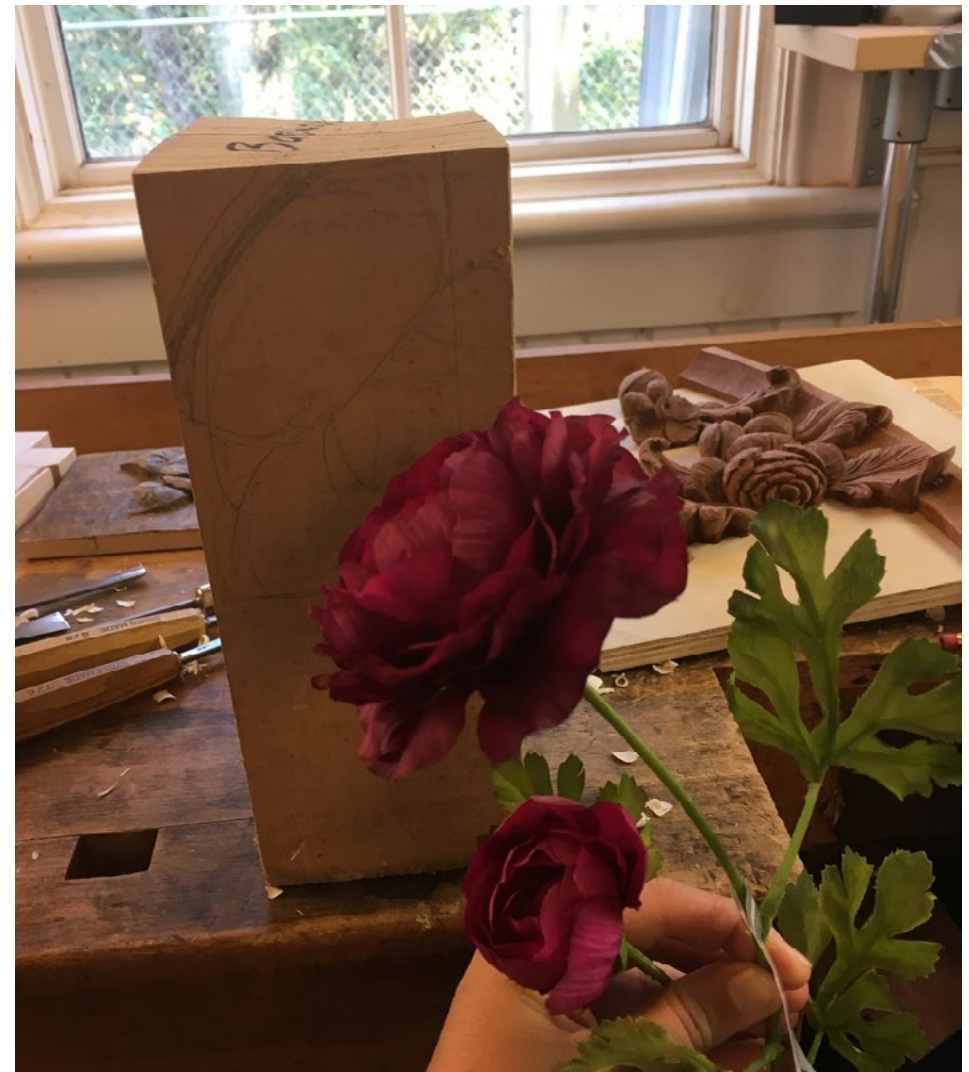
In contrast, while there are various styles and techniques found within Australian woodcarving, locating professionals that have training in a variety of styles is extremely challenging. As I want to develop my own distinct and identifiable style, I sought guidance from Mary as she has been trained in several different techniques. Additionally, Mary does not carve carousels or rocking horses, I felt this was important in allowing me to bring a new perspective into my own practice. The rich woodcarving history and cross-over of styles found in America made it the ideal place to study and hone my craft. The Fellowship provided me with the opportunity to explore carving approaches I would otherwise not have been exposed to.



Myself and Mary May at the end of our time together.



Relief Carving, Camellia Flower: executed in 10mm thick timber. This was an exercise in portraying depth in very shallow timber through the use of layers and cutting techniques to produce shadows.



Sculptural/3D Carving, Rose 1: Planning out the rose carving – this carving was done at 45 degrees to the end grain. This angle produces its own difficulties but will teach you the importance and speed to read and work with the grain.



Left: Sculptural/3D Carving, Rose 2: The finished rose. Tool marks were deliberately left on, as a guide and resource for my later work. Middle: Olivia Carving Rose. Right: Classical/Ornate Carving: The acanthus leaf, a staple in classical carving work and design. Variations of the acanthus leaf have been used for centuries across Europe and Britain.

Restoration of carousel animals:

To inform my restoration practice, I travelled to South Carolina and sought guidance from Rosa Patton. Rosa repairs and restores wooden carousel animals, often maintaining their original paint work, occasionally painting new designs herself. Rosa also restores other painted timber pieces, such as band organs.

Rosa has worked on many large and famous carousels and is regarded an expert in their historical finishing. It was recommended that I seek her expertise as she was highly involved in the carousel restoration at Luna Park in Melbourne. I was also very excited to practice gilding (the application of gold and silver leaf) and glazing (slightly painting over the metal leaf with thinned down artist oils) techniques that Rosa is also highly skilled in.



Olivia, Rosa and Ron: Olivia with Rosa Patton and Rosa's husband Ron at the end of our time together. Meeting Ron was an added, unexpected bonus. A technically brilliant artist with an untouchable comprehension on colour theory, Ron gave me several lessons on colour theory during my time in their workshop. He has really helped to aid my use and selection of colour.



Gilding and Glazing: This was a fibre glass mold that Rosa had selected for me to practice Gilding (the art of applying gold or silver leaf) and Glazing (applying a thin layer of oil based colour over the gold or silver leaf). Rosa selected this piece to do as it had a lot of depth and intricate parts.

Learning glazing was an absolute highlight of my Fellowship. Glazing was very popular in the 1920's on carousel animals and as a practice in decorative painting of all sorts.

Once the gold or silver leaf has been correctly applied and varnished, then you thin down artist oils with a gel thinner. A base coat of very fine yellow oxide is applied under the intended finished colour. Traditionally glazing was mostly done in pinks, greens and blues. It requires a very thin and a very delicate application process so that the leaf base is not torn.

Several shades are blended on the leaf to make the one appearance of one colour, the contours and shape of your piece are emphasized through the use of this shading and highlighting. It is very important that all of the applied colour remains translucent. The natural sheen and colour of the underlying leaf should still be noticeable as light moves across the piece. A fine layer of varnish is applied once everything has dried.

Giraffe saddle before glazing:



Giraffe saddle after glazing: the glazing work I did on one of Rosa's painted carousel animals. Note how softly the colour blends into the silver leaf, I have applied the full range

of traditional colours; blue, pink and green. I have also applied a warm yellow glazing to the gold of the saddle to give it more depth in places.



Bear 1 (left): Timber carved bear for a carousel that has been primed, sanded and fully prepared for colour application. Once this was done I then applied the gold and silver leaf details.

Bear 2 (bottom left): Starting to apply colour to the fur. Using artist oils that I have selected the three main colours in the bears coat and breaking that down in thick bands of colour over the whole bear.



Bear 3 (top right): Working back over the wet oil paint with a mop brush to blend to colour.



Bear 4 (left): Using the same techniques as Bear 2 and Bear 3 to emphasize the carving work in the fabric folds.



Bear 5 (right): Saddle painting was just basic colour blending on a large smooth surface. The gold and silver leaf have some light glazing over it to add depth. Unlike with the giraffe saddle the aim here was just to slightly enhance the carved shape beneath the leaf, not to be flashy and attention seeking. Once all is dry the entire bear was then varnished.

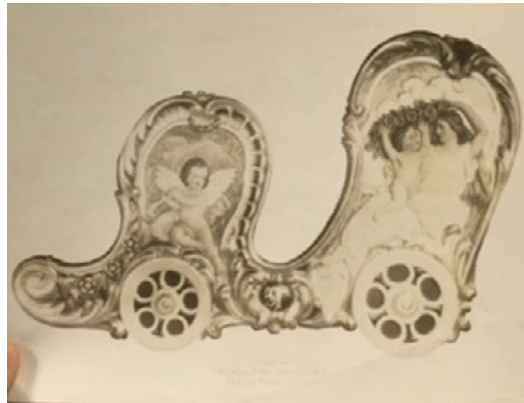
Technical planning:

In order to inform my technical planning skills, I travelled to Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Toboggan Company archives house technical drawings of historic carousel animals including the Luna Park carousel which was the company built. I sought to develop my understanding of how to interpret these drawings into full scale three-dimensional animals. As there are no carousel companies operating in Australia, the Philadelphia Toboggan Company were obviously an excellent resource to explore.

Examples of historic chariots (traditionally each large scale carousel would have one chariot. The chariot and its horses would be carved and painted in more detail than the rest of the carousel).



Left: Sydney Chariot (This chariot was shipped to Sydney in 1915)



Right: Angel Chariot

Chariot. Despite the sepia tones you can still see the subtleness of the application of colour and the elaborate carving details.

Whilst in America I visited several working historic carousels. I was particularly impressed by the Woodside Park Carousel by Dentzel Carousels made in 1902. The carousel has been moved and undergone a full traditional restoration to the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia.

The following photos show the carousel: Dentzel 1, Dentzel 2, cat, ostrich, pig, hares, horse, horse head. Note the carving detail and how the paint (matched to the original paintwork) has a subtle, realistic quality to the colours and is used to emphasize and compliment the carving work. Compare this to the image: new paint horse. From the Philadelphia Toboggan Company – carousel horses from the same era but with a modern paint finish. No recognition has been applied to the original paint application or colour palette, not only has this de-valued the horses but they have lost a certain quality.





5. Personal, Professional and Sectoral Impact.

Personal

This Fellowship has boosted my confidence enormously, by teaching me to trust my own skills. The knowledge and skills I developed during this Fellowship have been invaluable to my practice, working alongside these experts has helped me identify my strengths and areas of my practice that require further development.

Professional

Being a student for the first time in years enabled me to reflect on my educational experiences to determine which of Mary's and Rosa's teaching methods had the best impact on my-self as a learner, and the physical results of my work. I have implemented these teaching methods into my private classes and have seen positive results in my students success. I have also implemented several of Mary May's carving techniques into my own work. This experience has also inspired me to develop a one-day 'Introduction to Carving' class that will incorporate the practical skills and teaching methods exemplified by Mary May.

It was also a fantastic chance for me to be 'mentored', I believe that it is very important for younger people in a trade or profession to be able to reach out and seek advice, guidance and practical skills for people who have been through it all before. I was very fortunate to be able to learn from two very well known and respected women in their trades, it is comforting to see women who have stood the test of time, thanks to their remarkable skills and business sense survive in a very niche market.

In addition to the practical skills and teaching methods I developed during my Fellowship, my newly gained professional knowledge has had a positive impact on my career. I have recently been commissioned to restore my first carousel horse. Having undertaken the Fellowship, my ability to speak confidently with my client regarding the restoration, painting methods and finishing details involved with the horse, has affirmed my professionalism.

My goal for 2019 is to improve the quality of my rocking horses, paying particular attention to carving technique and adding realism to the features of the horses head. Thanks to the skills I developed with Mary May, I am confident that this is happening as I'm seeing improved results in my work already. An additional goal I have for the year is to branch out my carving into a wider area of application and finished product. I am hoping to diversify my work into sculptural pieces as well. I have started the planning process for several pieces that I am to carve before the end of the year.

Sectoral

As wood carving by hand in Australia is such a specialized industry, the results of my Fellowship and their sectoral impact are difficult to judge. I do believe that my continually growing knowledge and skill will have a positive impact. I believe that it is important that young people, particularly women can have someone within this industry who they can relate to, who is willing to share their expert knowledge, skills and experiences. In particular, the painting, glazing and finishing skills I developed while working with Rosa Patton, methods that are not taught here in Australia.

Hippocampus: Work in Progress. The shape and positioning of this creature from Greek Mythology is clearly influenced by that of carousel animals. I am working towards getting a large amount of detail and reference form my Fellowship into this piece: the carousel animal shape, the detail that is coming along and the acanthus leaf that makes up part of the saddle. When I have finished carving I plan to work in more of my new paint, gilding and glazing skills.



Hippocampus Detail.



Blue Heel Dog: only 60mm tall this was an exercise in sharp, precise detail in a tight amount of space.



Class Relief Carving: The newest addition to my class program as I broaden from only teaching rocking horse classes. I have now taught several one day relief classes, where students choose from the gum leaves or koi with good success from all students. I am currently planning more classes that can include more carving skills and incorporate some of my new painting skills.

Koi 1, Koi 2 and Hare: These two works are an exercise in capturing movement and the touches of necessary detail within my carvings.

6. Recommendations and Considerations:

I think that the promotion of traditional crafts and trades needs more attention.

I believe that establishing a group that brings together people in the making community will be of great benefit to the traditional crafts industry.

This group would benefit the traditional crafts industry as it is peer lead and as many makers are often isolated day to day and work by themselves it would be a chance to discuss and brainstorm and problem solve. The broad aim of the group is for its members to support and empower one another as well as opening up the paths for collaboration and skill sharing, networking, on-line business management, publicity, partnering with organisations to produce meaningful work, grant and funding applications, sourcing ethical materials, examples of traditional craft business' that have had success.

I don't know who will establish and run the group, I honestly don't think my stress levels could cope with a large roll in it at the moment.

This group needs to be flexible and have the ability to change and grow with the needs and demands of small businesses practicing traditional trades and crafts. I would propose such a group meet monthly, perhaps on the last Sunday of each month. Some meetings will be dedicated to members sharing and teaching their skills through hands-on demonstrations to other members.

Other meetings will invite special guests (experts in their fields but not necessarily working in traditional crafts and trades) to cover topics such as contemporary marketing, social media, the ins-and-outs of insuring work and products, small business expansion, advertising, budgeting, resources and so on. The group will operate independently with the hope of expanding over time. It is important that

this group make collaborative decisions with regard to the content being explored during meetings in order to remain relevant and ensure a high standard of quality workmanship is maintained.

Whilst I am aware that there are currently many groups and guilds for traditional makers, there are none that include the focus on contemporary business practices as the model expressed above. I believe this model will attract younger, professional makers, whose focus is not only on developing and educating each other on the physical skills involved, but also on the skills required to successfully run a viable business as a traditional maker in the current Australian marketplace.



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