

PART A – Project Submission

1. What is your project?

Project description including purpose (and why it was needed), location, mission, aims and objectives

The Blade: Australia's love affair with lawn

A Carrick Hill touring exhibition

This exhibition explores why Australians love lawn. Australians love gardens and gardening, and lawns are one of our most enduring landscape features. For over two centuries this much-loved use of grass has survived changes in horticultural fashions and environmental conditions.

The AGHS partnered with the Australian Museum of Gardening (part of Carrick Hill Historic House and Garden in Adelaide) to mount a national touring exhibition on a gardening subject aiming to attract a broad visitation. The lawn mower in all its manifestations is part of our national cultural life and an icon in Australian social history, exemplified by the Victa. The exhibition aimed to explore the Gardening Museum's collection including 23 lawn mowers and hundreds of tools related to lawn grooming and care from the past century. The design brief emphasised creating a self contained exhibit offering both enjoyment and understanding of the subject: lawn and mowing. Humour was to be used as a key tool in bringing the exhibit alive with the pun in the title setting the tone. Although the invention of the lawn mower in 1830 was a game changing moment, the team understood that not everyone is inspired by this fact.

The exhibition is a part of the 40th Anniversary of the Australian Garden History Society promoting awareness and conservation of significant gardens and cultural landscapes.

2. How does it demonstrate excellence and best practice in heritage interpretation?

Planning

Research, concept planning and methodology:

Audience – profile, expectations and issues

Key messages, themes and storylines

Communication – techniques and channels / choice of interpretive media

Design – problems solved, appropriateness to setting, aesthetic appeal, cohesive relationship with marketing

Environmental considerations

The Blade was designed as a touring exhibition. It has been on display at Canberra Museum and Gallery, City of Salisbury Council, Carrick Hill in the new Wall Gallery, and the New England Regional Art Museum in Armidale in NSW.

The Blade showcases more than 100 hand tools associated with lawn maintenance, including a pair of Roman grass clippers from 23 AD and tools used by Aboriginal people, who initially used fire as a grass management tool. The show also includes 12 historic lawn mowers dating from 1869 including Adelaide's own contribution, the 'Scott Bonnar', up to the very popular 'VICTA' ('zip on the do- da') rotaries from the 1960s and 70s.

The design problem was to get all of this interesting material in an exhibition that could be easily packed up and transported to different locations to be set up. The design would have to be flexible enough to work in a variety of different venues and orientations, but still tell connected narrative.

Richard Browning of Synthetic Creative Services was commissioned to design and implement the exhibition. He worked in close collaboration with the collection experts at Carrick Hill. The final result is an eye catching and engaging exhibition where people feel free to wander and absorb the interpretation and see the lawn tools and machinery close up.

To further engage visitors there were sensory and interactive elements. A lawn games area was set up where you can have a go at mini golf and quoits, or sit down in a deck chair and press a button to hear sounds of the garden, lawnmowers and passionate gardeners talking about the delights of the lawn.

A film was commissioned, starring Sophie Thomson from the ABC's Gardening Australia. It was filmed at in the grounds of Carrick Hill, demonstrating larger working lawnmowers as well as other interesting lawn grooming implements, and ending in a manicured lawn garden party tennis tournament.

Environment considerations were that the exhibition would be easily assembled and reused again and again. Robust wooden travel cases were also cleverly formed into the exhibition displays, thus avoiding to set ups and additional materials. The exhibition was planned to have a lifespan of five years, constantly on the move, so dings and scrapes would add character to the boxes.

Engagement

Audiences and method of engagement

Stakeholders and method of engagement (including consultation with communities and Indigenous representatives).

Carrick Hill collaborated closely with the Australian Garden History Society to develop the concepts and displays. Richard Browning was engaged to design a self contained travelling exhibition that needed minimal input from the hosting institution. The exhibition was curated by Richard Heathcote, the former Director of Carrick Hill and an active member of the Australian Garden History Society. The exhibition celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Australian Garden History Society and it is intended that the show will continue to travel across Australia.

Carrick Hill held various talks, the concourse and a school holiday croquet day. Some newspaper coverage provided a quirky take on the exhibition. Regular social media was posted to promote the exhibition and the creation of an accompanying film has enabled audiences young and old to learn the history of lawn and lawn mowers.

When Salisbury Council hosted the exhibition they used social media and print media to promote it across their network. At the Salisbury venue, the local community were encouraged to bring in their prized and heritage lawn mowers. The lawn mowers were displayed amongst the collection. Touring the exhibition the City of Salisbury Community Centre allowed an audience that would likely not visit Carrick Hill or be interested in garden history to view the show.

The project was co-created with the Australian Garden History Society, their donations contributed to the creation of the exhibition and they have been acknowledged in all print media, events and online.

The 20 interps panels used evocative/provocative titles such as Colonial Carpets, Power Lawns, Politicla Turf (nb. Parliament House Canberra is under turf and it is the most lucrative mowing contract in the country - if the grass dies could democracy be next! Jim's mowing would never let it happen).

Particular use was made of the great range of commercial art used in 19th & 20th centuries to advertise the sale of lawn mowers. Almost all these ads involved curvaceous women right up to the 1970s when the Flymo took matters to the extreme with ABBA like TV advertisements (segment included in the exhibition doc) - the hover mow was a Scandinavian invention.

Curator Richard Heathcote visited each venue and delivered a public lecture 'On the Lawn: a plant, a machine, an aesthetic' on the history and aesthetics of lawn in Australia. He also did media interviews on local radio. As the exhibition title 'The Blade' suggests humour was to be used to mow down any audience resistance either through the publicity and three poster paste ups exemplified this approach (ie. I came, I mowed, I kicked grass) Two articles on the exhibition have appeared in the AGHS quarterly journal (The Blade & Hallowed Turf in 2020 & 2021). 2 for 1 postcard was used at some venues with the paste up design.

Implementation

Stand-alone or multi-stage project

How project worked in conjunction with other facets of the operation (e.g. marketing)

As a touring exhibition 'The Blade' has been designed with robust structures that form display backgrounds and also aim to house fragile items for transport. The ability to pack up and display this exhibition in various locations including regional locations throughout the country provides smaller galleries an opportunity to efficiently rotate their displays and attract new audiences.

The design of the exhibition panels being able to travel with the show reduces the cost for the host organisation to build plinths and cabinets, thereby making it an attractive affordable traveling exhibition. A detailed exhibition manual accompanied the traveling show making it easy for the hosting museum (public space) to install the show.

The exhibition was designed from the beginning as a flexible, compact display that could easily be installed and packed up and put on the road to the next destination. Display cabinets double as their own travelling crates. Other boxes are used as storage for the smaller hand tools displayed on the walls. They are also used to mount lawnmowers on top when in situ.

The Hills Hoist display folds down and the ramps fold up and bolted together. This makes a cabinet, which is on wheels, easy to transport. Smaller objects are displayed in lit display plinths, which all fit into each other like Babushka dolls and have a wheeled base.

The entire exhibition packs up and fits into a medium size truck, this includes 2 pallets that the vintage lawn mowers are attached to. Set up usually only takes a day. A 12 minute film featuring gardening celebrity Sophie Thomson helps connect to a mainstream audience and is on rotation within the exhibition space. The use of everyday items helps tell a potentially dry story in a very accessible way.

Access (if appropriate)

Visitors with special needs (e.g. different language groups, low levels of written literacy) or special interests

Other strategies for improving visitor access

As the exhibition is set up differently in different venues, care is taken to assure that there is easy access for people with mobility issues. Richard Browning from Synthetic Creative Services, in most cases, help set up and curate following these guidelines.

Training (if appropriate)

Training and development programs for staff, volunteers or other stakeholders such as tour operators.

No training was required as the exhibition was stand alone, but staff at the various venues were supplied with set up instructions (PDF) and a verbal introduction by the designer or curator when the exhibition was being set up.

Poster, promotional postcards and a leaflet are supplied where visitors can get more information about the exhibition and lawn history.

3. Identify the resources needed for your projects (e.g. staff, materials, money). Demonstrate how you used these resources effectively.

Detail your project costs as accurately as possible including labour (incl. volunteers), materials and installation.

Choice of interpretive media for maximum or desired effect

Cost-effectiveness versus 'reach' to intended audience (here you may like to enlarge on project budget/cost)

Innovative use of resources / sustainability / future proofing

Funding:

Significant financial contributions have been made by two AGHS Branches under the 40th Anniversary Matching 2020 Grant Program (ie SA \$12,000 & ACT \$3,000).

The exhibition has been generously sponsored by:

- Ian & Pamela Wall \$20,000

- Carrick Hill Development Foundation \$15,000.

- The project was supported by the Curator and Film Director/Curator both carrying out their duties on a pro bono basis as both are AGHS members and wished to promote the Society. Under Budget breakdown the Film cost \$15,000 (not \$5k) and you should add Transport \$4,000 or it looks like we made a profit which we have not!

Budget breakdown:

Exhibition design - Richard Browning, Synthetic Creative Services \$4000

Exhibition fabrication- Winkle Group - \$18,000

Print – Signs by Knight - \$2000

Additional materials - \$2000

Film – \$5000

Total : \$31,000

Team:

Curator – Richard Heathcote

Exhibition Design – Richard Browning, Synthetic Creative Services

Producer/Director Blade movie – Julia De Roeper

Exhibition & Tour management – Carrick Hill Trust & the Australian Gardening Museum

Exhibition sponsors – Ian & Pamela Wall

Film funding – Carrick Hill Development Foundation

Exhibition partners – Australian Garden History Society

4. How has your project met clear and measurable outcomes for your client/organisation and stakeholders?

How project meet or exceed the organisation’s expectations (in relation to outcomes)

How project meet or exceed stakeholder/community expectations (in relation to outcomes)

How success of the project was measured

Commercial criteria (e.g. repeat business from your client or an increase in sales that can be directly attributed to your interpretation)

Environmental criteria (reduced impact in an area that can be directly attributed to your interpretation)

Pre /post project or audience research, monitoring, evaluation and consultation that has been conducted or is planned, including peer review and client assessment

Aspects of the project that did and did not work.

How the project could be improved.

The exhibition promotes interest in the Society, Carrick Hill and the Australian Museum of Gardening and provides valuable exposure to all three through media and word of mouth.

Local AGHS Branches and their venues receiving 'The Blade' can use the exhibition to theme joint programs for members and the public. To date the exhibition in Canberra has presented a program of public events including talks by local lawn experts from iconic locations such as Parliament House and the Hyatt Croquet Club. When able, curator Richard Heathcote has also presented a lecture based on the exhibition to interest groups and the public entitled 'On the Lawn: a plant, a machine, an aesthetic'.

National media coverage in 2020:

Australian Garden History journal

Radio National 'Blue Print for Living' (11 Dec)

The Australian (Weekend magazine)

ART Almanac & other online sites such as RiotAct

Art Guide Australia

Local media coverage relating to Canberra to date:

Radio ABC & 2CC (21 & 22 Nov)

Canberra Times

Canberra Weekly

City News

It is intended that the exhibition when it completes touring in 2023 will be integrated into the permanent exhibits of the Australian Museum of Gardening at Carrick Hill.

Feedback noted by House Museum Attendants at Carrick Hill has reported 'The Blade' has attracted a new and different audience interested in gardens and machinery rather than the traditional

art/history exhibition. A series of talks were conducted at Carrick Hill. A lawnmower concourse event on the grounds and during school holidays had croquet demonstrations.

Salisbury Council did similar programs when the exhibition was situated in their council community hub. Visitors were encouraged to visit on a Sunday afternoon where kids lawnmowers and games were available for young people to try. Visitors said that they would not of come to the Community Hub until they found about the exhibition and activities – this led to more people being aware of what services the Council had to offer.

When answering the questions, remember that the judges don't want to be bored. So don't be afraid to show your passion for your project. Write in plain English and use the principles of heritage interpretation to engage the judges and to persuade them that your project deserves an award. Ensure you follow the template and adhere to the submission guidelines, failure to do so could mean the difference between winning the award or not!