

Gather Episode 6: Collecting

[A delightful sound of choir leading into plucked guitar and different voices introducing the show, with guitar continuing underneath]

Woman's voice: Ah everyone, you are listening to Gather

Child's voice: You're listening to Gather

Woman's voice with dog bark in background: To Gather

Woman's voice with American accent: Gather

[Same guitar doing a sweet little riff with the faint sound of pencil scribbling beneath. Sound of guitar continues beneath the host's introduction]

Amy Tsilemanis (Gather host, smooth and calming): This is Amy Tsilemanis and this is Gather, with Minerva's Books and Ideas, where we'll explore the lives of books and the ideas they ignite and illuminate.

Woman's voice (host Amy Tsilemanis):

Hey it's Amy and a big welcome to this the final episode of Season 1, themed Collecting.

I am a collector and curator- stories, people, sounds, pretty things, weird things, old things...in my room right now I am surrounded by things that make me happy- a cardboard microphone, old booth photos, artworks, a peacock letter opener, a railway lantern, my nanas record player, a Coles Book Arcade Guide to the dances, and books, books, books.

I could make a whole series on this theme (feel free to commission me!). My collage for this episode is made from my collection of things found in books over the years- bookmarks, notes, recipes...and some of these goodies have inspired some of the commissioned works in this season- remember the wild radio play Mystery at Sea inspired by an ad for a cruise ship library? If not, go back to episode 2!

Sophie Livitsanis radio play: After three days of investigations, the ship's detective Mr. Remington Twentyman has summoned our band of unlikely friends to the library on board. And as we begin, they are preparing in anticipation for what will be an intriguing evening.

Amy: I also of course collect audio. A recent find on vinyl was romantic interludes. You never know when you might need some *[Romantic music from record]*

And I grew up with tapes, and you've heard bits from these over the season- my mum reading me bedtime stories:

Amy's mum Margot on old tape: Hello, Amy. How are you? What sort of day have you had? I wonder if it's still daytime or are you tucked up warm and snug in bed?

Amy: Me reading one of my angst teenage poems

Amy as a teenager on old tape: It's only words but my soul is under soles in the rain and under parasols on boats in the sun. This is almost fun.

and here is a snippet of a piece I made a few years back for All the Best (a place for great Australian audio) and a project they did themed Keepsakes. My piece was called Tape Archaeology and melded some of my collected sounds, including my little sister, singing her ABCs...

[Audio montage of layered sounds, a choir, a child singing ABC's, Amy reading the weather on a radio program]

And so, Gather has been a way of collecting all the interesting people and ideas and creativity together- I hope you have enjoyed the journey! And along with this final episode, this weekend we bring you a live event- the Gather Podcast party, A collection of wonderful people who've been part of the season and share their music, poetry, film and more, including the launch of Gather Threads- my first collection of one-off pieces combining my collages with second hand clothing.

But for now, in this episode we explore what we collect, why we collect- and cover the weird, wonderful and also some of the darker implications of collecting as we chat with Alice Procter about her Uncomfortable Art Tours, and her recent book *The Whole Picture*, subtitled 'The colonial story of art in our museums and why we need to talk about it.'

We venture over to California for our indie book feature with Natalie Jones and her bookshop The Modern First and chat about her life in bookselling and book collecting.

Our guest artist is audio extraordinaire Jess Fairfax for Things Found in Books, and we have check ins with the Gather team and our collecting practices! Dav Byrne, audio legend tells us about his predilection for mystery books- not like Agatha Christie but you know those Mysteries of the World uncovered! And we travel to designer Tiffany Titshall's property in Majorca, where she lives in an old schoolhouse and has recently created her own library in one of the old rooms, and I tell you a bit about one of my collections.

Another jampacked show of gathered goodies so sit back and enjoy the ride. The music you'll hear, fittingly will be a collection of things from throughout the season.... Enjoy.

So I am drawn to uniquely printed books, published locally, and if the content is good too then that's a bonus- this is how I've come to have a small collection of 20th century Australian women's poetry, from bigger names like Judith Wright's collection *The Moving Image* published in 1946 by the Meanjin Press, and Tilly Aston's *The Inner Garden* published in 1940 by The Hawthorn Press, or Ruby Sykes Lyon's *Stray Sunbeams* published 1926 by W.A. Hamer at 21 Jones Lane, off Lonsdale St, through to *A Housewife's Poems* by Ellie Pearson published by S. John Bacon at

317 Collins St, and finally Linda Brumby's *Interlude* printed at Morning Star Press, no date.

Researching these writers and presses might be a future project (feel free to get in touch with any leads), but for now I will read you some of their poems throughout this episode. There's one, that even mentions Ballarat!

The first little one here by Ruby Sykes Lyon and is called *My Fame*

*I do not ask for flaunting fame,
To voice in blatant tones my name;
I do not seek a place to find
Amongst the cultured of mankind,
But I would songs of courage sing,
That to the weary strength would bring.*

*'Tis better far to know that I
Have helped some tired passer-by,
That someone heard the song I sang
Whose notes of hope and courage rang
Where songs of culture never reach,
No matter what the creed they teach.*

*I only ask that I may light
Some dismal place and help make bright
With freshened strength some heart that may
Have fallen, hopeless, by the way,
'Tis more to me than brightest fame
That some sad heart has blessed my name.*

Alright booklovers- As we take a wander around Victoria, and around the world in this episode- let's head now to the gothic heart of Central Victoria at Gather designer Tiffany Titshall's place. Aside from designing beautiful logos, bookplates and such Tiff is an amazing visual artist, inspired by where she lives and her collection of books. She keeps all her art ones in her studio but here she shows us around her house library...

Woman's Voice (Tiffany Titshall): I'm Tiffany Titshall and this is my library in Majorca in Central Victoria, in what was a school house, a headmasters house. It's Brunswick green, and we have an old colonial window, I have repainted some Ikea shelves green and we have an old government bookcase that has glass, all the bookcases in here have glass doors because we have lots of bugs and dust because we're in Central Victoria, and a rug and a comfy chair with green pillows, a lamp that comes from my mums place and little cut out paper architecture that comes from the Alhambra in Spain, when we went there, table and chairs and some artwork on the walls.

Amy: So how much do you know about the school? What would have happened in this room?

Tiffany: Well, this room was actually the second bedroom of the headmasters house, so the headmaster lived here and possibly at times they would have lived here with their kids, and run and taught at the school which was on another part of the property. At other times it might have had another teacher living in this room. So it wasn't the school but I do have some books that came from the school that we found at a local farm auction that have the Majorca stamp in them- state school no 764, so they would have been studied somewhere on this site so they're in my little library here.

And really for me, everything in here, as an artist- sometimes I just look at the pictures and I don't read things. So it might be when we were working on the Gather logo I would have gotten out a bunch of books that had interesting engravings, old embossing on the old covers, (this one has an old ship) and there were books from 150 years ago that had really beautiful little symbols, potential logos in themselves, there's so much work in them but they're so simple. So when we were working on Gather I got out a pile of them here and what I like about being able to do that is I'm not relying on algorithms to be inspired. Even though this particular library is skewed in certain ways, it's quite white European, it's all interesting reference, potentially inspiring for me as an artist, and might be either as a designer or if I'm working on something like The Chosen Vessel ceramics/drawing collaboration where I might be interested in Greek images of sirens or something like that.

Amy: Yeah it's so cool. Why would you say you collect these books?

Tiffany: Well I don't know how to throw them away. I've tried to reduce, but that's really hard to do if something has an interesting image or line that you love, it's really hard to get rid of it, and to me I don't collect any one thing- I collect memories and reference and inspiration.

Amy: Awesome

Amy narration: It's super cosy in there, I wanna go and hang out more for sure. And Tiff's artwork and design is beautiful- go check it out!

So Tiff collects to be inspired as an artist and designer, and collects for memories, reference, learning and also the source, things from departed family and friends and the library itself a space to work and be in with a history of its own. In the realm of collections like this, there is an element of each to their own, but when it comes to the museum context and historically, the collecting tastes and habits of white men that sold or gifted their collections to what became public institutions, meant and in some cases continues to mean, that this is what is considered valuable, with little link to original context or the power imbalances at play right through from an items collection to display. It's this that our next guest Alice Procter challenges in her Uncomfortable Art tours and in her new book The Whole Picture. Alice spoke to us from where she is based in London.

Woman's Voice (Alice Procter): I'm Alice Proctor. I'm an art historian. And I guess I'm a writer. And I started a project in 2017, called Uncomfortable Art Tours. I had just graduated with a Art History degree and couldn't get a job. And so I was trying to find sort of things to do while I was in the, you know, terrible freelance circuit and that

sort of thing. And I had all this research and work that I'd done as part of my degree on colonial history and the way that it was represented here in the UK. I should say, I am Australian, my family are from Australia, and I was born there, but I've grown up mostly overseas. So I grew up in Hong Kong and London, with this very, like self conscious colonial biography, I guess. And I was very aware of the fact that while I was at uni, while I was working here, most of the British people I met didn't think about colonialism, and the British Empire as something that sort of affected them, or was at all present here in London. And so I had experience as a tour guide, I had this research, and I decided to just sort of start running tours and see what happened, basically. So for the first year or so I ran these essentially completely undercover guided tours, talking about colonial history. And then I started getting a bit more press attention and stuff like that. And they blew up. And I've been running the tours, and I wrote a book, based on them called *The Whole Picture*, which is all about finding colonial history and ways of telling stories through objects in museums.

Amy: I'm sure there's been mixed response from the institutions. But yeah, what what's the vibe been?

Alice Procter: I kind of got really lucky because by the time any of these museums sort of found out about me and what I was doing, I'd already had some press coverage. So it was quite hard to sort of like put their foot down and say you can't do this anymore. So I sort of Trojan horsed it a little bit in terms of getting into museums and doing that kind of thing. And generally speaking, the response from institutions like officially has been, she's nothing to do with us, and we don't want her doing this. But obviously, everyone is free to bring their tour groups and conversations into the galleries, and we're free and open to all, blah, blah, blah. From individual staff, including curators and the front of house people and the other educators, it's been a much more positive response. Because generally speaking, the people who are on the gallery floor every day, answering questions from visitors understand, like why this is important, and they know that I'm not there to, you know, burn down the museum. They know, I'm just there to bring a different kind of conversation into these spaces that they can't necessarily have in an official capacity.

Amy: Yeah, it's interesting, which you talk a bit about in the book, the sort of insider/outsider, where artists come in as well, which I'll ask you about a bit later. Can you talk a bit about the idea of museums as not being neutral as much as they've claimed to be through their histories and the kind of discussion around that?

Alice: Yes, so there's this this fantastic slogan, museums are not neutral, which comes from an American museum worker called La Tanya Autry. And it's become kind of a slogan in the museum sector for this idea that museums aren't naturally occurring, perfectly politically neutral spaces. You know, obviously these are institutions that have their own internal politics, but are also shaped by the politics and perspectives of the people that work in them. So, museums have historically tried very hard to present themselves as these kind of perfect objective untouchable spaces. And the more we spend time in them and think about them critically, the more we realise that that's, that's just not possible. You know, every curator, every member of staff is going to be bringing their own politics and perspective and opinions and things like that. And these spaces are actually like, very political, they're very entangled in issues around equality and inequality, marginalisation, you know,

museums are spaces that reenact the social conditions of the broader world, on a kind of microcosm. And so the idea that they could ever be sort of neutral or objective is really misleading. And part of it as well is that, you know, museums have historically been used to create those inequalities, it's like, the people that established these collections are doing so often to kind of preserve their particular view of the world. And so to try and then retrospectively say, these are perfectly objective institutions that just tell us everything, how it is, you know, is is really false.

Amy: So yeah, let's talk about the role of objects in your work, obviously, like you said earlier, it's about how they can tell stories. And it's so interesting how that's done in so many different ways. You know, you go through the patriotic and propaganda, through to questioning objects and how they came to be there, or the sitting with them in empathy, the need for them to be taken out of museums entirely. So many different ways. And yeah, I loved I think it was chapter eight, the tiger organ, which showed how an object can also be used to tell completely different stories for different purposes through time. Can you just talk a bit about how collected objects work in your book and tours, expanding people's understanding?

Alice: So I yeah, I mean, this is very much from my perspective, like, as an educator, as a tour guide, I realised quite early on from working with school groups and things like that, that it's always so much easier to tell a really complicated story if you've got a physical object in front of you. And if there's like a thing that you can pin it to. So I've done work like in a lot of museum spaces, and kind of heritage spaces. And having something to talk about makes it so much easier. And it's like having a prop, you know. And so working as a tour guide, I would sort of describe a lot of the work that I do as object-led storytelling. It's not just telling a story and making the object fit into that as a prop or a piece of set dressing, it's about starting with the thing and using that physical thing to unravel a bigger story. And so that's what I really wanted to do with the book, I wanted to take these specific real objects that people could potentially go and visit or go and see in a museum, and use them as the starting point, rather than as just sort of illustration to a bigger story, which I think is what a lot of art historians and historians tend to do. It's like, here's my narrative, and I'll just stick in some pictures to make it more fun. Whereas I think starting with the object, and having that kind of biography of the object as your beginning point, which is something that I tried to do at the start of every chapter, is give the story of the thing. Before I get into like unravelling it, is more accessible. And yeah, I think just a really important way of remembering that these physical things carry so many lifetimes and stories within them. And we can use them to sort of unlock different lives and different biographies and connect to individuals that way.

Amy: Yeah, it works really well. I originally was thinking of asking you if you had a favourite object, and that felt a bit wrong. But yeah, is there anything that's particularly struck you in your travels?

Alice: I do love the tiger, the Tipu Tiger story, because of the way that it goes from being this incredible object of political power. You know, it's a wooden instrument that is designed to show a tiger killing a British soldier. And it's based on a real story. And the tiger was the political symbol of the man who commissioned it to Tipu Sultan. And so it's this very striking kind of piece of visual propaganda. Once it comes into the UK, it's treated very differently. It becomes a toy. They briefly talk

about displaying it at the London Zoo like it's a wild animal. And now I have a souvenir of it, I have this felt Christmas decoration of it, hanging above my desk because it's become like the star object at the Victoria and Albert Museum. So that is an example of like, how many lives has this image gone through. How many different versions of this have there been? There were British ceramics made around the same time showing the same telling, the same story of the Tiger killing a British soldier from a British perspective as well. And it's become this kind of narrative object that's so much bigger than it. And yeah, that was the kind of most striking example for me that was always going to be in the book, of using this ornament, that's had so many different lives. To get into all those different biographies, you could write a whole book just about the different, like lives and iterations of Tipu's Tiger.

Amy: You could! and so you put your hand in and play an organ. Is that right?

Alice: Yes. So the idea is that there's like a crank handle, that moves the tiger. So it's paw like lifts up and smacks the man and the man kind of rolls around a little bit. And it makes like screaming and roaring noises. But then you can also drop down the side, and there's a little piano in there. And you can just play it like a musical instrument.

Amy: Yeah, the book covers so many of these interesting, complex ideas. And there was one towards the end that I found particularly moving, which was about when objects actually don't exist anymore, because they've been stolen or destroyed by war. And yeah, you write "there's no way to replace things that have been lost. All we can do is hold space for them" which is a whole other aspect of collections, isn't it when there's that absence, but there was a beautiful artist's response of recreating objects from the National Museum of Iraq. Do you want to talk about that a bit?

Alice: This is a project by Michael Rakowitz, he's one of my favourite artists. It's this sort of ongoing project called The Invisible Enemy Should Not Exist. And he is an American, Iraqi Jewish artist working around different diasporic and displaced identities. And a lot of his work is about food. And he uses food and the community around food as a way of exploring questions of heritage and identity and things like that. And so in this project, he looks at these objects that were destroyed, stolen, presumed lost during the American invasion of Iraq in the 2000s. And so these are pieces where we've got like photographs of them, we've got the museum catalogue records and stuff, but the actual things are missing. And sometimes they show up, but mostly, many of them have been destroyed. And so in their absence, how do we tell these stories? What do we do when we can't sort of see or touch the actual object. And so he creates these really beautiful, quite charming, quite sort of quirky, little bit kitschy replicas out of food packaging, for the most part. So he uses like, tins of Harissa paste, or like dates, or olive oil, or the paper packaging that different types of noodles come in and stuff, and makes these kind of very, very charming... there's no other way of describing them this sort of kids project, art homework on steroids, like reconstructions of objects that have been lost from the museum collection. And he displays them alongside the original labels. And the idea is not to replace what's been lost. But to think about, yeah, holding kind of a space for the things that we don't have anymore. And doing that through something like food, which is really intimate, really personal, really performative as a way of saying, we don't have this

sort of tangible cultural heritage of these museum objects anymore, but we have a more intangible history and identity that comes through the way that we gather as a community, the way that we consume things, the way that we sort of feed and nourish ourselves. And they're really beautiful. Like, I cannot stress this enough, they're gorgeous. And his work is very funny and very kind of quirky, but with this really serious message of loss and grief, and I think, taking something like the sort of intangible cultural heritage of a community that comes through things like passed down recipes or food or like, what's your taste of home sort of thing, and using that to then become these other physical objects that have been lost or destroyed or taken in a violent way, that then displaced many of these people that are trying to recapture that sense of home is so beautiful and so interesting. And yeah, they're just really, really gorgeous. He's one of my favourite artists and does this really very compelling way of thinking about history and memory.

Amy: Amazing, I'll have to check it out. And I'll share a link for people to have a look at his work. So yeah, I wanted to shift a little bit as you were saying you've lived in other places most of your life, but being Australian in a way as well. How do you think that shapes your perspective and the need for decolonisation?

Alice: I was born in Sydney, most of my family are from Adelaide and live in Sydney and Adelaide. I spent my childhood sort of visiting and going to those places, but I've never lived for any sort of significant length of time in Australia since I was a baby. I grew up in Hong Kong, and then in London, and I've been in London for nearly 20 years now. And it's interesting because I have never felt British and I don't think I will ever feel British. And part of that's probably because for most of the time I've lived here, I was not a British citizen, I was an Australian citizen with sort of slightly questionable leave to remain and things like that. And there was always this kind of sense with my parents that we might not stay here forever. And so I never like really let myself feel sort of settled in here. And part of the root of my work is this wanting to understand sort of where my history and experience as like a white Australian person who is, in a way, you know, by being in London, I've like come back to the motherland. But I've never felt that and I've never sort of been compelled to see it that way. So yeah, I've always been really interested in the way that location and perspective shapes the stories that we tell. And part of that is coming from the fact that, you know, I was at school here in the UK, and I was hearing very different interpretations, shall we say, of some events compared to what I was getting at home and what I was getting from my family. And so I was aware from quite an early age of like the difference in perspective, and how that changes your understanding of history. I started studying art because I was interested in objects and stuff. And I wanted to be a historian, but I liked looking at things and touching stuff. And so it made sense to be an art historian instead. And working in museums, I was really interested in like, how the things get to be here, and what does that do? And yeah, I think a lot of it comes from moving between these places, you know, and being in Hong Kong at a really formative time in my life, but also, being there for the handover from the British to Chinese governments was like, oh, okay, this is this is a thing that's very much within living memory, that is still very tangible, and very important. And yeah, having parents as well who, you know, moved to Europe so that their kids could be closer to like history and culture was a thing that I was acutely aware of too.

Amy: So yeah, I was hoping to focus in on one of the objects that you talk about to talk about a few issues around it. The chapter in the book that focuses on the shield held in the British Museum. There's a big discussion at the moment around repatriation of objects back to their original communities, and the pushback from places like the British Museum, could you talk a bit about that object and the story around that.

Alice: This is a shield that originates likely from the late 18th century in Australia. It's red mangrove wood, it probably comes from the region around Sydney, Botany Bay kind of area. Its actual biography is really messy. It is discovered in the British Museum collection in the 1970s, with like, half a label attached saying 'Cap Cook'. And so from there, people start kind of creating this biography for it that links it to a shield that was taken by Joseph Banks, on the day that he and Captain Cook landed at Botany Bay, in what is now Australia. And the account of that day is written from the British perspective, as you know, we landed on the shore, we fired our guns at these men because they wouldn't go away, we hit one of them in the leg and they dropped a shield and we picked the shield up, and it's very unclear what happens to the shield after that point. The story is also told by Gweagal people in Australia as like very different and very much about the arrival of these strangers and people coming to the beach to try and kind of meet them. And the story of the shooting and the shield is also present there. But obviously, the perspective on that memory is very different. So this object is in the British Museum, and it's displayed as the Captain Cook shield and they give it this kind of blowing biography connected to the story of Captain Cook and Joseph Banks. It looks a lot like one of the shields that's drawn from Banks' collection, it's most likely that one, but its actual provenance is really sketchy. And then more recently, people start asking for it to be repatriated. So the leading voice in this is a man called Rodney Kelly, who is the descendant of some of the people who were on the beach that day, and has kind of traced that history. And once the shield to be returned to Australia, there are plenty of people who've sought its repatriation. Kind of alongside that to say, Yeah, this is where it should be, it should be displayed in a collection here, it should be used to tell a very different story. The one in the British Museum is all about how, you know, Captain Cook discovered Australia and has this absolutely awful line in it justifying, you know, the shooting of these men on the beaches: "First contacts in the Pacific were often tense and violent" which is the most gut-wrenching understatement I can think of. So in the kind of wake of these requests for repatriation, the British Museum finally starts to do more research. And that's where they turn around and say, 'Oh, actually, it's not the Captain Cook shield, you're all wrong, but we're keeping it. And it's really important to us that we keep it forever.' And, like what the museum have essentially done is try and have it both ways, right? Like, it's not the Captain Cook shield, so we can't repatriate it, because we don't know when it actually came to the UK. But also, it's valuable because of this association with Captain Cook. So we're going to keep it on display and keep talking about it in relation to Captain Cook, because that's where it's kind of value and status comes from. And it's really messed up. So this is an object that I talk about in my tours and in the book, to try and understand how museums are often very selective in the kind of stories that they tell and the information that they seek and the research that they do. In the case of the shield, it's very clear that the museum have begun research in order to defend their claim to it. As it is, some of the research I think it has validity. There are questions about when it comes to the UK, there are questions about how it gets here, and sort of what its

context is. They don't justify the museum keeping it, in my perspective, like there's some legitimate questions about its provenance, but they're not enough to justify holding on to it and refusing to repatriate it. And it gets into this question that the British Museum and other museums in the UK, the US the Cultural West often have around restitution, which is that you have to prove some kind of continuity between you today asking for this object and your ancestors or your community, as they were 100 200 300 years ago when this object was first taken. And in many cases, because of colonialism, that is impossible, because these are records that are not kept or they're destroyed, or they're reliant on oral histories that are not taken seriously by Western institutions. And it becomes this kind of constantly moving goalpost of, what does it take to get an object back? What does it take to have something repatriated? It's great that more research is happening around the shield. I think it's great there's more research happening around other objects that were connected to this sort of first arrival of European explorers, and what's now Australia and these kind of moments of violence and recognising that, you know, in taking this shield and these other objects, that's the first step in what becomes these really violent histories of war and genocide and dispossession. And to recognise that this object might not solve, would never sort of solve or resolve those histories. But it would at least be a gesture to repatriate something, you know, it has a symbolic power, not to rely on that symbolism to sort of sweep other histories under the rug, but to recognise that actually, sometimes a gesture is really important.

Amy: I'd love to come on one of your tours one day, it sounds amazing and amazing that people are getting to experience this questioning, I suppose. I wanted to ask, What do you think we as museum visitors can do to be more aware and questioning, other than going on your awesome tours?

Alice: So I think something that I've sort of always tried to make really clear is that, you have, as a visitor, you have all the power that you need to ask these questions. And the most important thing for me is like learning to read these kinds of labels critically, think about who is named on these labels, you know, here in the UK, and in a lot of other museums around the world, you'll see labels talk about the donors who give things to a museum, you see people talk about things being acquired or collected or donated, but you don't necessarily see stuff about like, who made them. How was this acquired? Was this bought? Was this taken? Was this like, stolen? Like, how does this get here? And so I think that if you're going to a museum, like going in completely cold, not sure where to start, the best thing to do is look around, look at these labels, kind of find the things that draw you to them naturally, find the things that are most interesting to you, whether that's aesthetically or stylistically or whatever, just work out what you gravitate towards, and then read the labels and then go and do some homework, basically. If you see a name keeps coming up of a collector, or you see a place that seems to have been the source of most of these objects, and you're like, Well, how did they all get here? You know, you can ask those questions, you have the power to ask those questions and make things a little bit difficult. And also, like, don't forget that there are people who work in museums whose job it is to supposedly, help you understand these things. And, obviously, be polite. Because I guarantee you that the gallery staff and the educators at these museums are not getting paid enough. But what you can do is ask them and talk to them and say, like, hey, what's the deal with this object? And if they don't know, maybe they'll ask someone else. And maybe it'll eventually get up to the

curators that, you know, people are really interested in this collection, and there doesn't seem to be enough information here. The way that we sort of change and challenge museums is the same as the way that we change and challenge any institutions like there is force coming from the outside, there is transformation coming from within. And there is this kind of slow drip, like war of attrition from visitors. And as a visitor to a museum, I hate this, but you are a customer, you are a consumer. And these institutions are spaces for the preservation of historical artefacts, but more and more they are also running as businesses. And if you as a visitor are asking questions and kind of pushing, these spaces respond.

Amy: Yeah, that's interesting, isn't it? I just remembered the final line to the book as well: "You're a visitor, you have powers, and you can make trouble if you want to." So take that on people.

[Gentle piano music]

Part of the magic of personal objects comes from their journey through different owners and lives (the charm of second hand books with inscriptions for example) but the provenance of museum objects can become dark and violent very quickly when put in their colonial context that is often absent from museum labels and narratives. as Alice states in the books title, it's something that needs to be talked about, and we're glad she's leading the way. Thanks, Alice.

Well, we come now to our creative segment Things Found in Books, with Jess Fairfax who has taken the idea of marginalia in this soundscape. Enjoy

Things Found in Books segment intro

Woman's Voice speaking slowly *[with a vintage sound playing beneath]*: Things found in books

Old radio style male voice *[archival audio, with jaunty music beneath]*: You'll hear a new intimacy and richness

[Jaunty music continues beneath] Man's voice putting on Louis Armstrong singing voice: Things found in books

Music of Melanie Safka song, Look at my Song Ma: I wish I could find a good book to live in.

Music fades out

MARGINALIA

Written and Composed by Jess Fairfax

Inaudible whispers

Synth music starts

Voice:

I've started collecting

Those notes you find

Scribbled in the margins of books

When I'm alone

The kids at school
I spend treasured, quiet moments in the local second-hand bookshop
Flicking through pages
Trying to find faded thoughts
They are usually always etched in pencil
Erasable
Perhaps a sign of humbleness from our margin authors
That their ideas do not deserve the same permanence
As the original composers
They linger within an intermediary world
Somewhere between reading and writing
They were never written with hopes of grandeur
Just a moment, when readers were so moved,
Or perhaps angered,
Or inspired
By a word or sentence
I know that feeling
I too, am one of those margin authors
I read, pencil in hand
Underlining, doodling, commenting
Without the pressure of an audience
The words become etched into my mind
The ideas become beacons of promise
Those moments that make life about more than just surviving
These notes I collect
Are like faceless conversations
Their author's whispering to me between the lines
That we are here
That we are hungry
That to always remember
That books can subvert the mundane
That between their covers
Lies a world so full
Of wonder

Sound-scaped Whispers (notes I've found scribbled in the margins of books):
Communication is not linear, anymore?
Estuary, the word is as beautiful as the image
Mortals and immortals were separated
The warmth of fire was once luxury but had become a necessity. Is this cause for our carnage?
The crisis of meaning in the modern West is an issue of culture not of morals
Our necessity is food so why do we undervalue it so much?

The economy and the spirit should be inseparable. Maybe then we'd stop exploiting and
start respecting
Community connectedness is social capital. Value it. Estuary, the word is as
beautiful as the image

Woman's Voice (Jess Fairfax): My name is Jess Fairfax, and I've been in radio for about 10 years doing live radio on PBS. And then about halfway into that I sort of got into doing more produced pieces, and then kind of exploring sound design a little bit. So worked with a few spoken word artists. I've always done music. So that's, I guess, always come in to the pieces that I make, you know, having quite a strong music bed to them. Yeah, my practice is so varied. Like you know, when you get asked What's your occupation? on those forms. I just never know what to put. Like, I get anxiety because I'm like, I don't know. Do you want me to list everything? It's too hard! So yeah, I finished my master's last year in environment, I worked in community arts. I remember there was one person that I spoke to who had a similar sort of background in music and environmental sustainability stuff. And I'm like, how do you put it all together? And he's like, I don't. The only thing that makes everything join together is me. And I was like, that's a good way to put it. You know, it's just you don't have to necessarily bring it all together in projects. It's just yes I do all of these things. And what links them all is me.

Amy: I like, that, yeah. Do you want to tell us a little bit about your show that you did on PBS? That was really cool.

Jess: So it was called All our stories. And I co-produced for quite a lot of that the show with Leah Avene. And it was basically just about highlighting all the stories that make up who we are, as a society, as a community, really shining a light, particularly on stories that are often missed or underrepresented in the media. So, with PBS having a music license, I guess it always kind of had that bent to it, but we definitely stretched the boundaries a lot around that. Somehow I would try and link it back to music. But yeah, you know, we would speak to historians and visual artists, musicians, poets, academics, just all the stories that make up who we are, I guess, and it was such a brilliant show to do, I think, you know, probably in the time interviewed over 800 people. And that was always like, the best part of the show. Like I love music, and I love programming music. But for me, what made that show so worthwhile was all the conversations and the interviews and the chats and I just loved speaking to people about their passions and what they were doing. Yeah, it's definitely been yeah, my love with putting this show together as well. This theme is called collecting. So that just made me think yeah, I think we love collecting people and stories and interesting things together, and audio is a great place for that.

Amy narration: Thank you Jess for your beautiful work. And I have a plan my friends, if you would like it, to release some of the extended interviews with my guests that have had to be ruthlessly cut down, so look out for that in the future. A reminder too that as part of our work to make Gather more accessible, all the episodes of Season 1 will soon have transcripts so along with all the extra photos and links and things you can explore them too, over at minervasbooks.com Excitingly the podcast party this weekend will also have live Auslan interpretation, I can't wait so please spread the word- Sunday December 5 at Ballarat Trades Hall or stream online, between 2 & 4 pm. Pre-book your tickets and you will also get a copy of the Gather zine. We have a mix of wonderful guests from throughout the season performing live including Ellen Sorensen aka Shadow Feet singing for us on the

upright piano, through to the electronica of Floc and the soulful sounds of DeborahN, and 3 brand new premieres for you- film in Auslan from Ramas McRae, poetry from Sean M Whelan, and the first screening of 'Intimacy in Isolation' a pandemic collaboration from Bronwyn Blaiklock, Erin M McCuskey and Lily Paskas. We also have video messages from Hilary and Philip from episode 1 and their Coles Funny Picture Book musical, Belle Chen and her sounds from home project from Episode 2, and young writer Frankie from Episode 3. It will be a wondrous gathering and we'd love to have you there.

A poem here from Linda Brumby's *Interlude* (published in 1964 with Morning Star press)

MUSIC, MUSIC, MUSIC...

*In every city everywhere,
If you look, you'll always find
A happy group of people,
Not quite the "usual" kind.*

*The "Music, Music" people,
And I'm glad that I belong –
For half the battle's over
When you face life with a song.*

*And when these people meet
And get together, for a "do,"
It's such a bright occasion
For it's music, music, too!*

*The television's put aside
(Let those who will, abuse it),
With artists here from every sphere
We wouldn't think to use it.*

*There's music here for every need:
From "serious" to "pops".
From opera to sing-songs,
From a ballet dance to "hops"!*

*I love to feel the sudden hush –
That falls upon the crowd
When a celebrity is announced,
And applause is long and loud!*

*And oh! To see the pleasure
And the joy that it can bring,
When a happy song is coaxed
From the man who "doesn't sing"!*

At the "Studio" in Elwood,

*You know you'll always see
Artists and musicians
Of great variety;*

*And many of the fondest thoughts
Within my heart today
Are of people I have met
At a "Featherstone Soiree".*

*But wherever it may chance to be,
I know they'll all be there
Filling the hours with happiness;
Forgetting every care.*

*And if I chance to hear a song
Which speaks of other times,
And grow pensive for a moment
In its remembered lines...*

*And if my smile should falter,
There's nothing gone amiss:
I'm just remembering Ballarat –
And other nights like this.*

*For Music is the golden bond
Which draws good friends together,
Whether near - or far apart,
The heart remembers, ever.*

*Music, Music, Music!
There's magic in the word!
There's charm, and warmth, and unity,
Because the heart is stirred!*

*And what a joy it always is,
When we join in Auld lang Syne –
To have shared a night of music
With these good friends of mine!*

So we heard earlier from gather designer Tiffany Titshall, and before we head to our indie book feature in California to close this episode, I want to introduce you to Dav Byrne- an awesome musician and audio engineer who has been mixing each episode of Gather to perfection. I caught up with him at his place in Ballarat to hear a bit more about his collecting...

[epic music and man's voiceover]

Every moment in time, creates questions the human mind cannot answer. out of reach past all we can see, hear, and touch beyond all we understand, lies... the extraordinary

Amy: So I'm sitting here with the wonderful Dave Byrne and we're having a beer. I had a wine with Tiff when I was chatting to her. So we're celebrating, It's, you know, been a long year of gathering sounds and interesting things together.

Dav: And this is the last interview of the season. It is the season to be finished.

Amy: Can you introduce yourself?

Dav: I'm Dav Byrne. I'm based in Ballarat, originally from Bendigo. I've spent a lot of time in Melbourne, and been a sound engineer for 20 or so years now, did a lot of work in the live scene in Melbourne, mixing bands and recording bands and coming up with jingles and working at various voiceover studios. And yeah, sort of got a lot of experience in a lot of the areas I guess, podcasts only being quite a recent venture of mine, and I think it's come off ok. What do you think?

Amy: I think a lot of the feedback has been about the quality production, so yep, you can feel good about that.

Dav: Good. But yeah, at the moment, I work in a voiceover studio in Ballarat TVOG and master a lot of independent music as an extracurricular.

Amy: You're a busy man

Dav: Better to be busy than twiddling your thumbs, I think. Yeah,

Amy: The theme is collecting. And when I first came to your place, I noticed an intriguing collection of books, which I thought I'd hear a bit more about.

Dav: Well, I've got a few book collections. You're not talking about the Stephen King collection that's almost complete, almost missing one, two or three books. But yeah, my air quotes here, nonfiction book collection. Yeah, I really enjoy large sort of coffee table format books about mysterious and unexplained phenomena. And always have been fascinated with ghost stories and strange and unexplained pictures that have been taken, you know, the Abominable Snowman, Loch Ness monster, UFOs.

Amy: Did you ever watch Unsolved Mysteries?

Dav: I definitely would have caught a few episodes. The one I loved was The Extraordinary. Yeah, the Aussie one, fantastic show. Warwick Moss. There's a voiceover artist. I think he's still around.

Amy: So your collection of mystery books? What really intrigues you in this genre?

Dav: I'm not exactly sure. It's something that I've been into ever since primary school. I'd always borrow certain books from the primary school library and return it and just get it out again straightaway. Some of these mysteries are so persistent across generations of the human experiences for centuries, I guess people have talked about unexplained footprints and sightings of strange phenomena. It's definitely interesting to me that there are still things we are not 100% sure of. And in

the case of these books, I imagine 95% of it is complete twaddle. But it's fun to read about and I guess as a kid, it's fascinating because you're not sure what's real, and what's not real. You know, when you still believe in Santa Claus. It's in a book, there's a ghost picture in a book, of course ghosts exist. You know, as you get older, there's definitely ways to explain most of these things. So yeah, these sorts of books hold a special place in my heart where I would just pour over them, you know, maybe maybe late at night with a torch under the donna sort of thing. Yeah, I've always sort of liked being scared by things as well. Horror movies, you know, heavy metal music, reading about vampires and thinking they're gonna appear at the window at night, you know, there's an excitement to the unknown and the unexplained. I think it's pretty cliched. I'm just a big kid.

Amy: Yeah, that's interesting. Being scared, I guess. Yeah. That's the experience of being a child and learning what the world is and what your kind of boundaries are. And yeah, so you still collect them now?

Dav: Yeah I've been collecting in dribs and drabs for decades. You know, I might see something cool in an op shop. Pick it up, or you know, I'm sure I've picked up a few things at Minerva's of this ilk. The collection sort of began a bit more seriously when I started ordering secondhand books on the internet when shipping wouldn't completely kill you. This might be five, six years ago. And I think I've got over 50 sort of books of this type now.

Amy: So do you want to read us something from one of your favorites?

Dav: Yeah, well, this is actually a book that's not one of those large coffee table books. But one of the first, I guess, books that sort of got me into this sort of thing, it's called the Book of Lists. It's from the mid 70s. So a lot of the information is now out of date. And I've worn through two copies completely. This is the third one. And there's a bunch of different chapters in here. Some of this stuff is still, you know, holds a lot of interest, they could release an updated version every year like a Guinness Book, and I'd probably buy it every year. This is from the original Book of Lists, Chapter 21, etc. This is The People's Almanacs: 15 favorite oddities of all time. Number one: coincidence.

[Dramatised voice and sounds, aka Dav getting his voiceover on] On December 1664, the first in the greatest series of coincidences in history occurred. On this date, a ship in the Menai Straight off North Wales sank with 81 passengers on board. There was one survivor, a man named Hugh Williams. On the same date, in 1785, a ship sank with 60 passengers on board. There was one survivor, a man named Hugh Williams. On the very same day, in 1860, the ship sank with 25 passengers on board. There was one survivor, a man named Hugh Williams.

Dav: A lot of these books, are so interesting for the accompanying imagery as well.

Amy: Yeah, definitely gets in the imagination. I guess another interesting thing about these books is they're collections of things within the books as well, aren't they like, collections of oddities, curious things. Have you ever found out anything about any of the authors that put these sort of collections together?

Dav: There's a lot of different authors of that Book of Lists. They also put out a bunch of books called the People's Almanacs, as a series, I've got three of them, I'm not sure if there's a fourth one or any further editions. But they're more, they're not magazine format, but they're magazine install, where they'll just jump from subject to subject. So they're not as organized as the Book of Lists. I think it came out before the Book of Lists, but again, same sort of thing where they'd have a bunch of different authors contributing, and celebrities contributing lists and stories and anecdotes.

Amy: Cool. What is an almanac?

Dav: I think it's a collection of articles and information released at the end of each year by certain publishers, whether it's a you know, like a farmers union, or, you know, you'd want to have the weather patterns for future reference, or I think they're just large reference books that collect a bunch of information. But I didn't know this was a quiz show. I thought this was I thought this was an interview.

Amy: Okay, let's, let's get back on track. So yeah, you as you were saying, have done lots of interesting things in audio over the years. And I was interested to ask you what's something strange that you've come across, that grabbed your interest in audio land?

Dav: There's lots of unexplained sounds that have been recorded, and I could go on about them. That's probably better just to look up unexplained sounds on Wikipedia, where a bunch of really strange sounds are being caught on underwater microphones or hydrophones. Lots of them are so low in frequency that in order for humans to hear them, they've had to speed them up to get the pitch up to within the range that we can hear. And, you know, there's some fascinating things there. I guess there's musical mysteries too. One that's got me thinking recently is there's a song it's known as, 'Like the Wind. This is a song that no one knows its origin. And it's available to listen to on the Internet. In fact, why don't we just go into the future and just make it happen. Here it is, Like the Wind:

[non-descript song, part rock part folk, part hard to say]

Dav: So no one knows where that song is from. The story goes that some guy recorded it off the radio in Germany, I believe the radio station was Norddeutscher Rundfunk. I think it's a public broadcaster in Hamburg. And this guy that recorded all this music, as we probably all did back in the day, press pause when they back announced the song so you could fit more music onto your cassette tape. And because of that, there's no record of the song being back announced. And no one can work out who it is, where it came from, really anything behind it. There's lots of theories, most of these theories have been debunked. And some artists who were suspected of being behind the music have denied any involvement. So yeah, there's a few theories. One of the more mysterious ones being that it was a demo tape of a band who were killed in a bus accident on tour and never reached the heights of fame that they could have. Another theory would say that it was just a song that was boring enough to completely fly under the radar for the rest of history. I would like to think because I like mysteries. I would like to think that it's just all one big

prank. One of these days, maybe Taylor Swift will do a cover of it. It will sell millions and then someone can come out and sue her. That'd be interesting. Yeah.

Amy: Hmm, mysterious songs. Okay. Would you like to say anything else about working on Gather?

Dav: Oh, well, it's been a pleasure. It really has been a nice time. A lot of the music that I work on is quite aggressive. A lot of the ads that I work on are also quite assaultive in their own way. So yeah, it's nice to work on something a bit soothing and relaxing and informative, and people seem to really like it. I'm stoked about it.

Amy: Thanks so much for being part of it

Dav: You're very welcome

Amy narration: Thanks for everything Dav, what a champ.

So we've heard people's love of collecting books and stories, of the traces held in second hand things, on collecting for memories, history, curiosity, learning, inspiration, and also how we can be more critical or questioning when it comes to collections in museums....

For our final guest and indie book feature I had the absolute pleasure of chatting to Natalie from the Modern First, a bookish friendship formed online and a great supporter of the show and of books! I couldn't help but notice the nice bookending of the season, kicking off with Coles Book Arcade and ending with Natalie's thoughts on the book trade going forward. Here she is...

Woman's voice (Natalie Jones): I'm Natalie Jones, and I'm co owner of The Modern First with my husband. We actually just got married. So yeah. Thank you, thank you. And we've been doing The Modern First since around 2016. And it's named after a book collecting term actually, modern first editions, books printed generally from 1900 to the present day, some people may say maybe like the late 1800s, and then they'll cut it off at like the year 2000. And after that is a hypermodern first. I thought that was a neat name for something because we believe in books being for the future, and not something that is just for old sort of stuffy people, or, you know, it doesn't need to be so pretentious, and that collecting books can be for everyone. And we'd like to bring that sort of into the modern world. And, you know, look behind the velvet curtain, if you will. And that's sort of our goal.

Amy: Oh, I love it. Can you take us behind the velvet curtain?

Natalie: Yes. It's a, you know, it's a very, very old profession. And, you know, it goes all the way back to, you know, the first maybe Gutenberg Bibles. Those are things of course, that we don't own, but a very ancient profession with a whole lot of history. But not a lot of younger people I found really know what a collectible book is, that books can even be collectible, that they can be rare that they can be valuable. You know, there's just so much to learn. And it's really fun to you know, sort of share history with people. There's just so much there. I I'm not even sure where to begin.

Amy: So is it all online, your bookshop?

Natalie: Yes it's all online. We'd love to one day have a gallery and an in house press where we can do small sort of chap book things to share local and sort of marginalized voices that maybe are not able to, you know, publish through conventional means, and we'd love to do that one day, but for now, just online-modernfirst.com , which has been helpful, you know, with COVID It's been it's been messy for everyone. But thankfully, we've for the most part been able to carry on through our online business, which is we're very fortunate for. We don't just sell modern first editions, we sell older books, you know, maybe the oldest book I think we had for sale at one point was from the 1500s, the 1500s. But mostly we sell modern first editions, fiction, nonfiction, really anything, any subject, we've probably sold a book on it from head hunting to Picasso. You know, there's, we probably have sold a book on it.

Amy: So yeah, the website has lots of goodies on it as well, because you sort of write about books too, don't you?

Natalie: That would be my partner. He is a fantastic writer, he does the writing for the blog, my husband, and he always is writing and you know, learning as much as he can. And so he he's the one that is the author of the blog posts

Amy: Was there one about covers that I read?

Natalie: Yes, I was that the ugliest dust jacket one? Yeah, I think he's meaning to post a follow up. I have several contenders. But yeah, he has a great sense of humour. And that's one of my favourite blog posts that he's done.

Amy: So can you take us through a standard day for you running The Modern First?

Natalie: Yes well, the days are never standard. And then that's what we really like about it, it's, you know, it's always something different. Some days, we have tons of orders, and we're just wrapping most of the day, and then you know, getting them out to the post office. Other days, we're going to estate sales, we're book hunting is what we call it, and trying to find more books to list on the website. Sometimes we are just going to thrift stores. And then other days, we're just merely listing, which is probably the least exciting aspect of it, but just getting the books on the website. It's also a part of it. But you know, it varies from day to day. And that's really, you know, I really enjoy that.

Amy: Tell us about the book hunting, what are some of your finds that have been exciting?

Natalie: Well, I've never been a morning person, and I regret this. But my husband years ago, he saw a post online of someone that was selling art books, and he asked me if I wanted to go and I wanted to sleep in I said, No, thank you. And it was actually this was a son of a local art professor. And he had tons of these 1930s You know, 1800s, you know, books on abstract art, with original, you know, pieces, like folded into them, that were signed, and they were all signed to the professor, you know, and the artists knew him. And he came home with this huge box of these amazing books. And I thought, Oh, I better become a morning person. But, but

sometimes, you'll come across posts online where someone is wanting to get rid of things that belonged to a grandparent. So a lot of times we'll find books through that avenue.

Amy: It's definitely a journey, isn't it? All the different places you go as a bookseller.

Natalie: Yeah, it's really interesting. Do you know, my favourite is when a previous owner writes inside the book, it's not necessarily going to make the book more valuable. In fact, in terms of, you know, monetarily, it usually decreases the value. But for me, it always increases the value because I love to learn about the previous owner. And what the book meant to them, that's one of my favourite things.

Amy: Definitely. Yeah, I've been thinking about that, with this theme of collecting and why we love the second hand and the traces of all the things the object has been through. Collecting, why do you collect and what do you collect?

Natalie: I think personally, I collect because I'm really into the preservation of history, and sharing it and keeping it safe for future generations. And I collect because of that, you know, I hear of so much history getting lost. For me, it's important to, you know, if there's a diary, if there are letters, to keep them safe. And I also really like to, if I can find the families that are living have someone that wrote letters, I try and find them and return them to them. And I've been successful a couple times. I found there was a book on, written by Doolittle, it was 30 Seconds Over Tokyo, and it had some letters from the war, and they were writing home from when they were abroad. And I thought these are, you know, really special and it had the guy's name and it was, really interesting to read about his experience in the war. And I thought if I someone had that from my grandfather, I would love to have that. So I I contacted The US Department of I believe it was the, the Air Force and I said, I have these letters. And they actually, were able to find them, they tracked the family down. And it was a silver star general. And the children and the great grandchildren actually lived next door to each other, and I was able to send them to them. And they shared the letters with each other. It was really cool, I really loved that.

Amy: So yeah, I wanted to ask what the most precious or rare book is in your collection?

Natalie: Oh, gosh, this was the question I was really thinking on. For me, I'm very sentimental. So any, any book that was given to me as a gift, usually those are the most precious because I think of the person that gave them to me and I, you know, I keep every card that was given to me, but usually a book that was gifted to me, I'll always keep and those are, you know, they're not the most rare. But those are, those are the most special. And then something that for me in my own collection, unfortunately, my husband isn't here to answer what his most precious item is, because he has some really great stuff. But I have a it's a map from World War One, it's a booklet, but it's it's hardcover, and it's up the Rhine region. And inside, there was a pressed Poppy, I guess from Flanders Fields. And there were photographs of the soldier in his uniform, and empty envelopes to write home with. And like areas on the map, you know, were sort of penciled like, starred, like, they had been there. And I thought that was. I wish there were some letters so I could return them home and, you know, figure out who this guy was. But you know, to see the poppy and it's, it's

ancient and very, you know, fragile, things like that, that for me, I think that's really neat, I thought that was very special.

Amy: So my final question, which you touched on a bit earlier about different people in industry helping each other and wanting to see it thrive, but yeah, what are your hopes for the book trade into the future?

Natalie: My hope is that it continues, that it doesn't die out. And that more anyone, young, old, anyone that has even a tiny little interest to sort of give it a go and, you know, explore the world of books. And you don't need to necessarily go to a school, there's so much information out there that you can on your own learn, and just to keep it going and preserve the books for future generations and the book trade to keep it going, you know, as long as there are books.

Amy narration: Well cheers to that and to all the wonderful bookish folk that have been part of gather Season 1. This month we also celebrate 5 years of Minerva's Books and while we're not entirely sure what the future holds our website and social media will continue as bookish hubs for all the friends we've gathered from around the world. Stay in touch with us, and spread the word, and thanks so much for listening.

And a final poem from Linda Brumby

I SEND MY LOVE

*I send my love to all: This is my message:
To family, to friends, both old and new;
Through midnight hours, when no loved voice is near me
My thoughts will somehow wing their way to you.
Tonight, I cannot say all that I'm feeling
Nor send you all a message with a dove. . .
But, even though the night should take me from you –
In spirit – always – I will send my love.*

Gather is produced by me, Amy Tsilemanis, your humble gatherer with sound engineering by the amazing Dav Byrne. The show is proudly created in Ballarat Australia on Wadawurrung Country and we invite you over to minervasbooks.com for full show notes and credits, photos and more! And to enjoy the collection of 8 episodes filled with creativity, curiosity and connection.

Adios amigos