



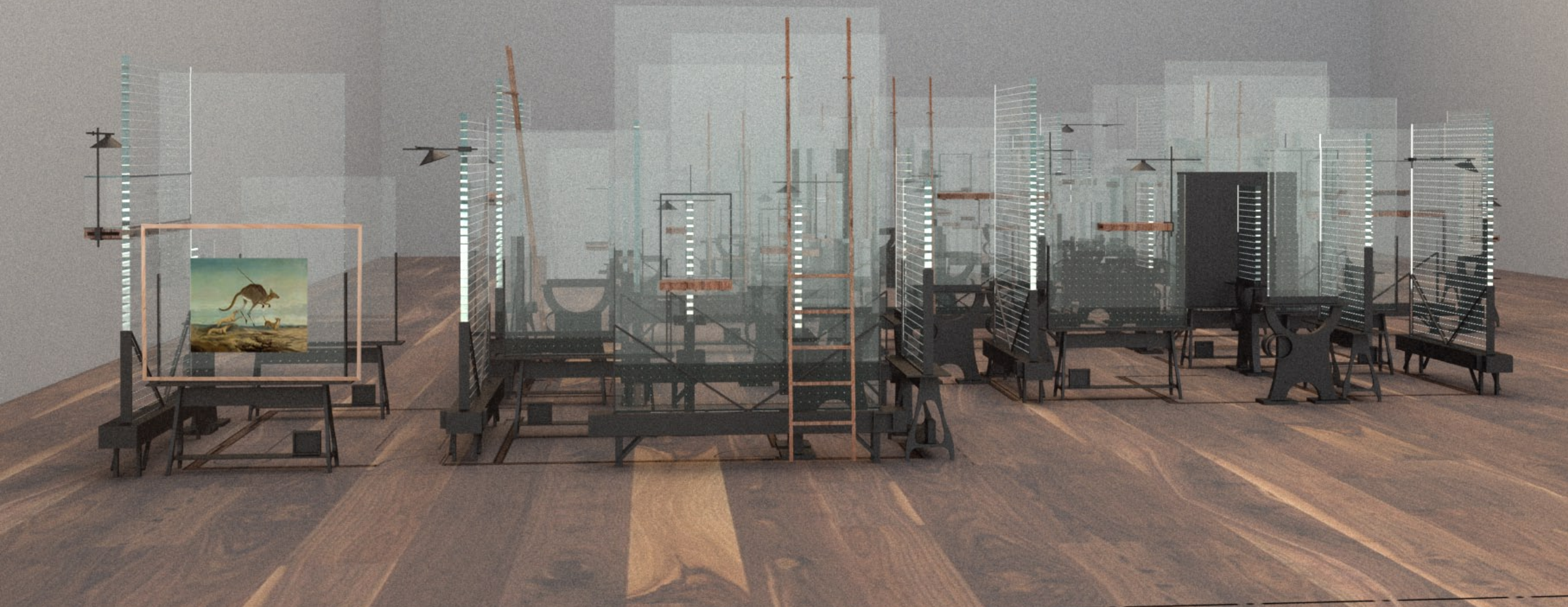
the grimwades'
miegunyah: an
architectural
palimpsest

THE IAN POTTER MUSEUM OF ART MIEGUNYAH
STUDENT PROJECT AWARD 2018 | KATJA WAGNER

IMAGE: Overlaid images from Poynter and Thomas (2015), pp.122-23,158-59: William Strutt, *Bushrangers, Victoria, Australia, 1852, 1887*; Russell's workshop at 'Miegunyah', Toorak.

In 1987, the largely colonial collection of art, decorative objects, furniture, books, specimens, historical documents and tools of the Russel and Mab Grimwade 'Miegunyah' Collection underwent a significant contextual metamorphosis, transformed from being the decorative contents of a picturesque homestead on a leafy property in Toorak, to the carefully archived and studied subjects of the University of Melbourne's Cultural Collections and of the Melbourne Museum. The selling of 641 Orrong Road Toorak by the University of Melbourne was a painstaking decision which has since enabled the funding of an extended Grimwade vision.¹ Nevertheless, over the course of the past months I have been reflecting upon the enduring influence of the 'Miegunyah' property on the collection which bares its name, as its common narrative and shared membrane. I have considered the continued participation of a placeless 'Miegunyah' in the life of the museum objects today, proposing a form of architectural palimpsest (or multilayered superimposition) to facilitate this dialogue.

THE PROPOSAL: AN ARCHITECTURAL PALIMPSEST



art object: James Alfred Turner, *The kangaroo hunt* (1873), oil on canvas. The University of Melbourne Art Collection, purchased 1994, the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Fund.

GRIMWADE ARCHITECTURAL SPECIMENS



COOK'S COTTAGE, Fitzroy Gardens, East Melbourne (1755, reconstructed 1934); photograph Katja Wagner 2018



WESTERFIELD, 72-118 Robinsons Road Frankston South (1924) designed by Harold Desbrowe-Anneer; photograph < <http://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/6137> >

It is revealing to consider the history of the 'Miegunyah' house and property alongside Russell and Mab Grimwade's largely colonial collection of art, texts, specimens, furniture and Australiana. They have a symbiotic relationship beyond that of simply 'container' and 'contents', and were developed in tandem over the first half of the twentieth century. Two further architectural elements of Grimwade Australiana of this period include Westerfield – the Grimwades' house in Frankston, designed by Harold Desbrowe Anenar in 1924, and Russell Grimwade's remarkable importation of a Yorkshire cottage now memorialised as 'Cook's Cottage' to Fitzroy Gardens, in commemoration of Melbourne's centennial celebrations of 1934.² Indeed Miegunyah, Westerfield and Cook's Cottage could be seen as literal applications of Russell Grimwade's perception of an histrionic colonial identity in material form: an apocryphal, golden-age Australia in the wake of Federation and the 'Great War'.³

MIEGUNYAH: 641 ORRONG ROAD TOORAK



MIEGUNYAH, 641 Orrong Road Toorak: photographs October 1933, from Poynter and Thomas (2015), pp.100,110

Miegunyah had its roots in the Gold Rush era of the 1850s, when it received its name, apparently 'my home' in a local Indigenous language.⁴ Russell Grimwade illustrated the founding moments of the house's history with characteristic flourish, speaking of its growth from the ballast of ships transporting cargo between the gold rush epicentres of California and Victoria. Nevertheless when 'Miegunyah' was first established by John Goodman, the house was a freestanding masonry colonial structure of modest scale and significance, a state in which it remained until purchased by the Grimwades in 1910 (under Mab's name, as a wedding gift from Russell), from which point it underwent a

succession of modifications over five decades.⁶ The most significant phase of building works occurred in 1920-1921 when the house achieved what Miles Lewis amounts to its general present form, attributed to the Arts and Crafts vernacular of Desbrowe Annear, celebrated internally with a monumental, chamfered fireplace. In 1933-1934 works were carried out by Stephenson and Meldrum, with a series of minor alterations in 1945 by Arthur & Hugh Peck, and in 1956 by Grounds, Romberg & Boyd.⁷ A leadlight window of Cook's Endeavour by Daryl Lindsay is also integral to the building fabric.⁸





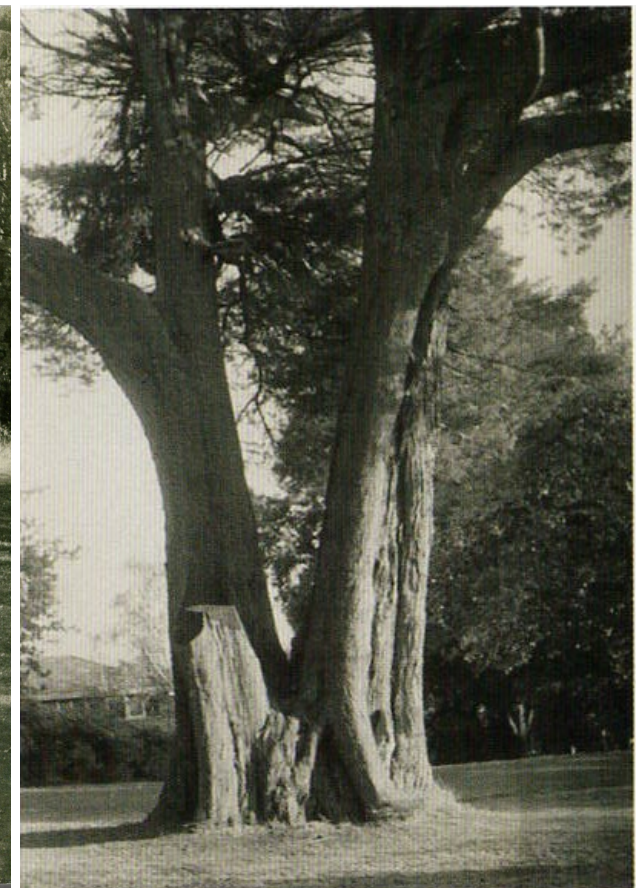
MIEGUNYAH, 641 Orrong Road Toorak: photographs from L: The Ian Potter Museum of Art archives; Poynter and Thomas (2015)



The garden at Miegunyah was a further focal point and the product of the Grimwades' own labour and imagination. A canvas for the deployment of their naturalist and horticultural interests and expertise, it incorporated a series of Australian Arts and Crafts sunken 'rooms', a pond, English vernacular masonry and Italianate elements (believed to have had input by landscape architects Edna Walling and Ellis Stones, E. F. Cook and later John Stevens), in addition to a productive kitchen garden, rose beds and a carefully maintained eucalypt aboretum.⁹



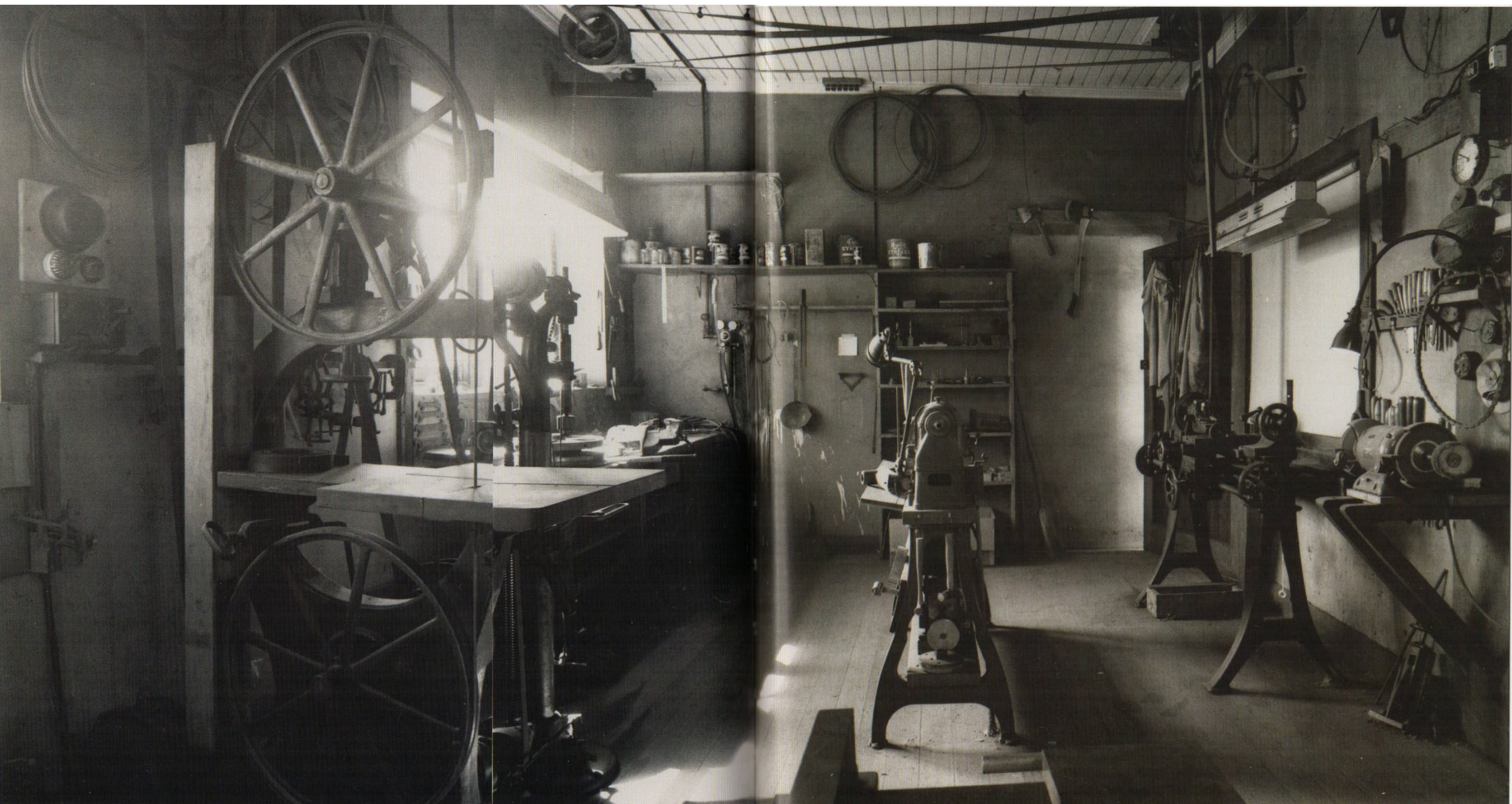
MIEGUNYAH, 641 Orrong Road Toorak: photographs from L: The Ian Potter Museum of Art archives (image dated 1913); Poynter and Thomas (2015) p.114; The Ian Potter Museum of Art archives (image dated 1915); The Ian Potter Museum of Art archives (image dated 1915); Poynter and Thomas (2015) p.118



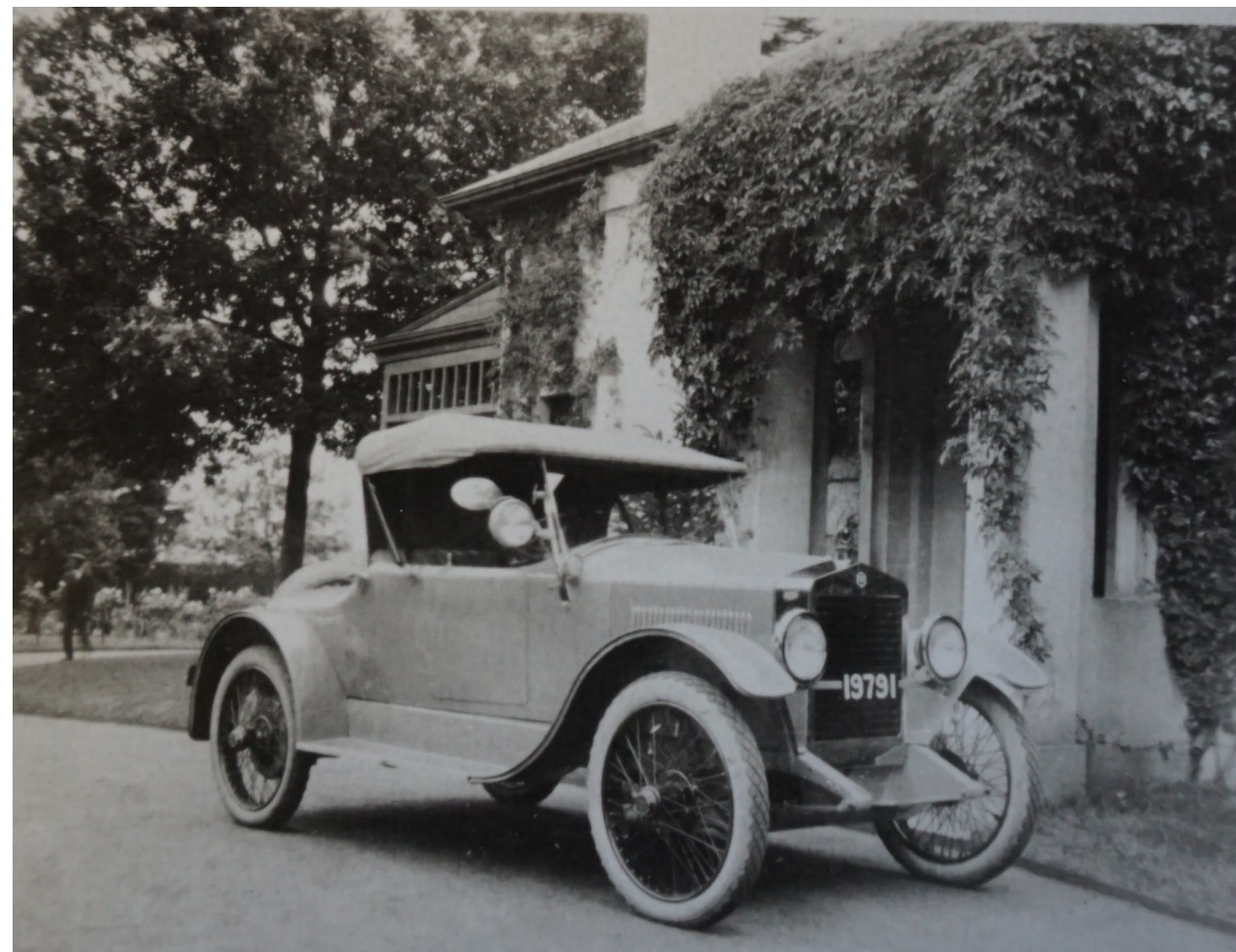
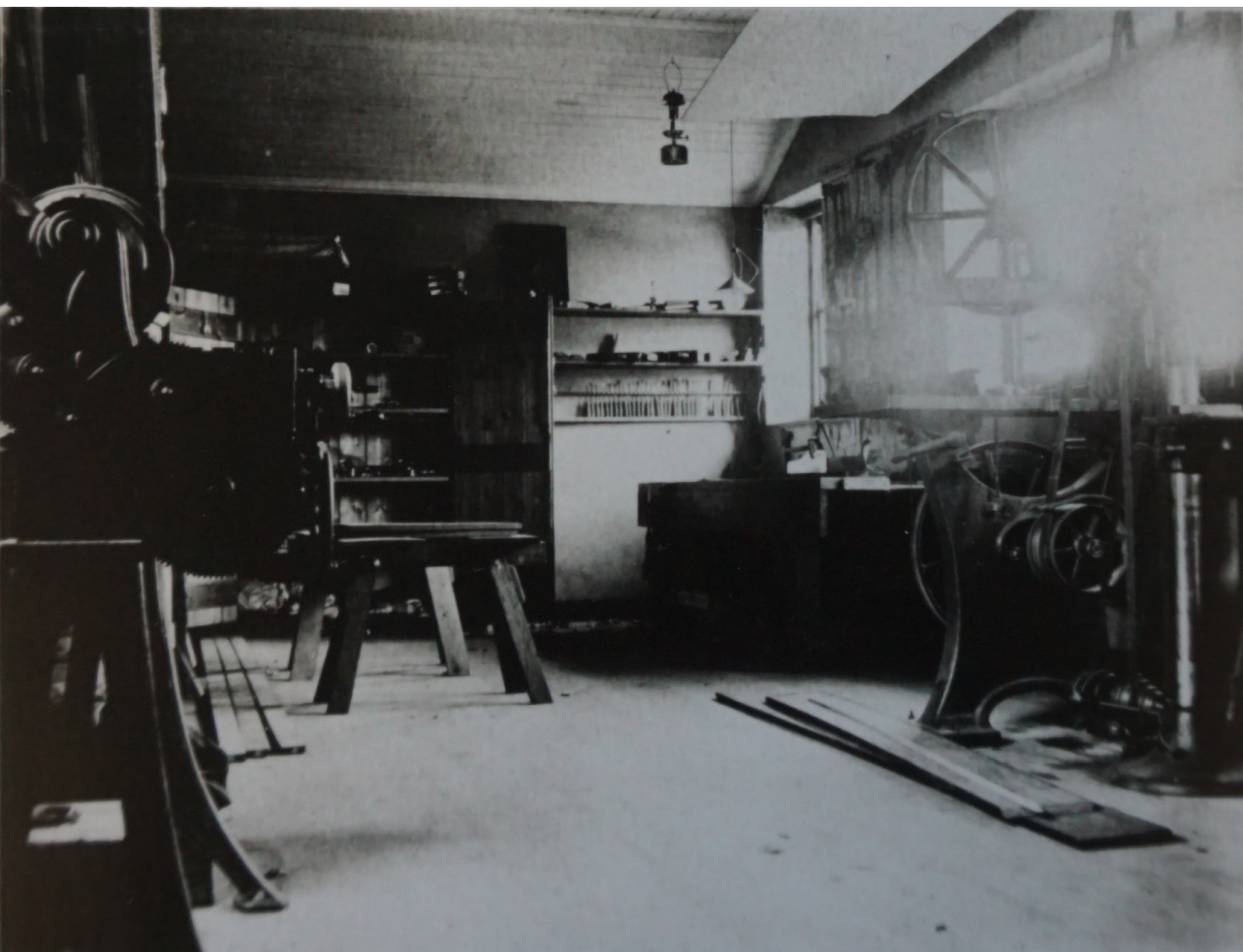
MIEGUNYAH, 641 Orrong Road Toorak: photographs from L: Poynter and Thomas (2015) pp.117,120

It was in this setting that Russell Grimwade's garage and workshop was located. The Miegunyah workshop was one of the first points of attention for building works, converted in 1911-12, and subsequently redesigned by Philip Hudson in 1923 after a fire.¹⁰ This was the focus of Russell Grimwade's industriousness and the key theatre in which the full intensity and diversity of his skills and interests played out, with characteristic meticulousness and professionalism.¹¹ Russell Grimwade was an inheritor of the cultural and scientific

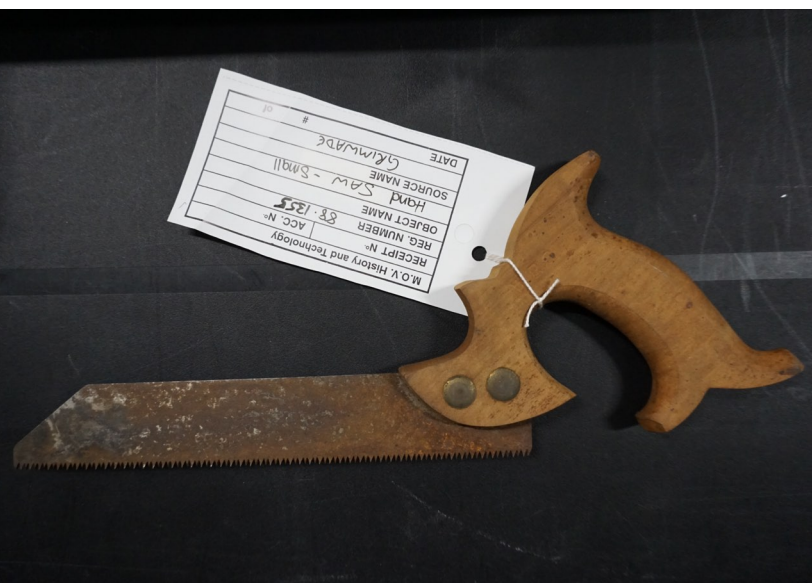
entrepreneurialism of early Melbourne through his father Frederick Sheppard Grimwade and Frederick Grimwade's business associate Arthur Felton. I have become fascinated by the symbolism of the Miegunyah workshop as the laboratory for Grimwade's engagement with timber and carpentry, metalwork, automobile technology, and possibly chemical experimentation, amongst a network of cables, shafts, tools, dials and utensils.¹³



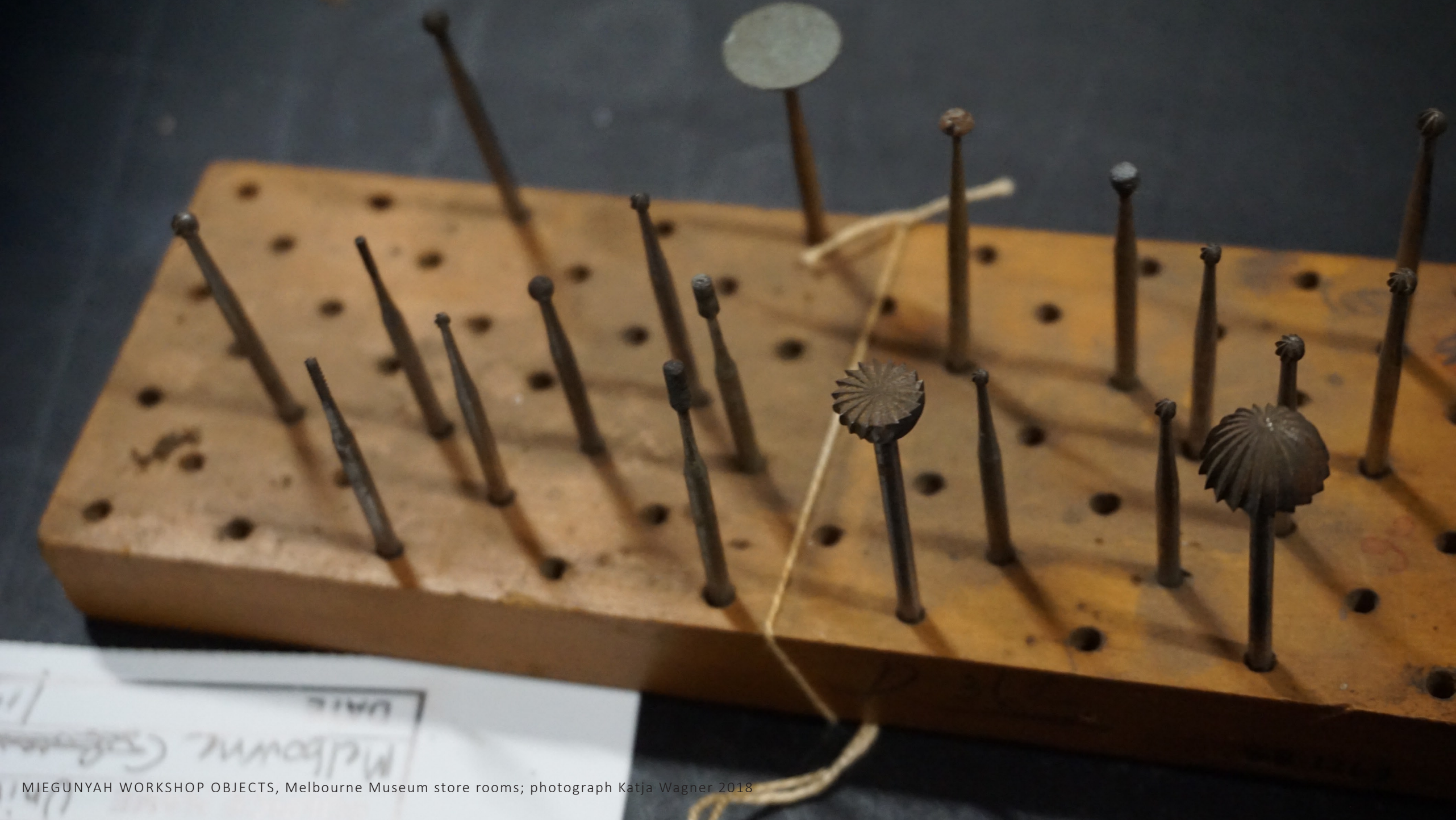
MIEGUNYAH, 641 Orrong Road Toorak: photographs: Poynter and Thomas (2015) pp.122-23



MIEGUNYAH, 641 Orrong Road Toorak: photographs: The Ian Potter Museum of Art archives (image on R dated 1919)



MIEGUNYAH WORKSHOP OBJECTS, Melbourne Museum store rooms; photograph Katja Wagner 2018



MIEGUNYAH WORKSHOP OBJECTS, Melbourne Museum store rooms; photograph Katja Wagner 2018

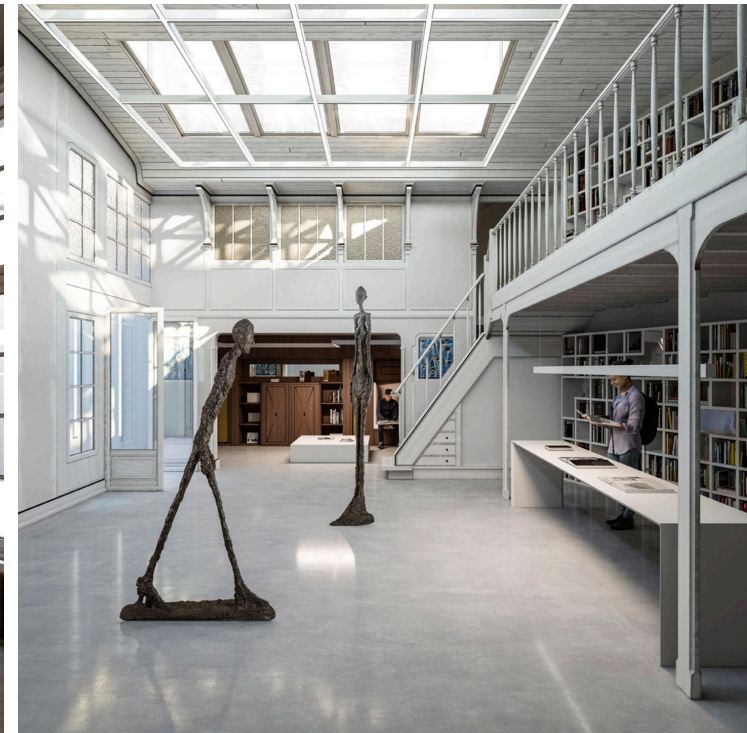
SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM LONDON



SIR JOHN SOANE'S MUSEUM LONDON (1797-1837) designed by John Soane; photographs from L: < https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_John_Soane%27s_Museum >; < <https://www.soane.org/> >

I started my investigations into architectural and museological contextualism through a study of house museums, starting with the quintessential example of the John Soane Museum, London. Among other parallels, Soane's intent for his museum to be utilised didactically shares a likeness with Grimwade's vision for Miegunyah as the setting for what he evocatively imagined as 'an antipodean Clarendon Press.'¹⁴ The importance of the house museum for the collection was underlined in October 1997 when Grimwade Intern Laurelee MacMahon curated a display of Miegunyah objects in-situ for a Wesley College Open Garden Day. Poignantly, The University of Melbourne Fine Arts Society Bulletin published an article headlined 'The Grimwade Collection Makes an Excursion Home', Benjamin Thomas later noting the value of 'seeing the works in their original context, to be understood within the original domestic setting of the Grimwades.'¹⁵

GIACOMETTI INSTITUTE PARIS



GIACOMETTI INSTITUTE, Paris (existing 1914; refurbishment 2018) fitout by Pascal Grasso and Antoine Gâtier; photographs from L: < <https://thespaces.com/alberto-giacomettis-studio-comes-to-life-in-paris/> >; < <https://www.fondation-giacometti.fr/en/> >

At this point of my research, the interdependence of Miegunyah the place, and Miegunyah the collection was formidably enmeshed. The newly renovated Giacommetti Institute in Paris in which Alberto Giacometti's work and studio contents are sophisticatedly composed within the residence of an Art Nouveau contemporary, further encouraged me to consider the period interior as an instructive museum environment.¹⁶ In the same vein, I pondered the use of the 1888 Building on campus, with its Arts and Crafts interior and leadlight commemorations of Australian WWI soldiers, for its resonance with the Miegunyah homestead.

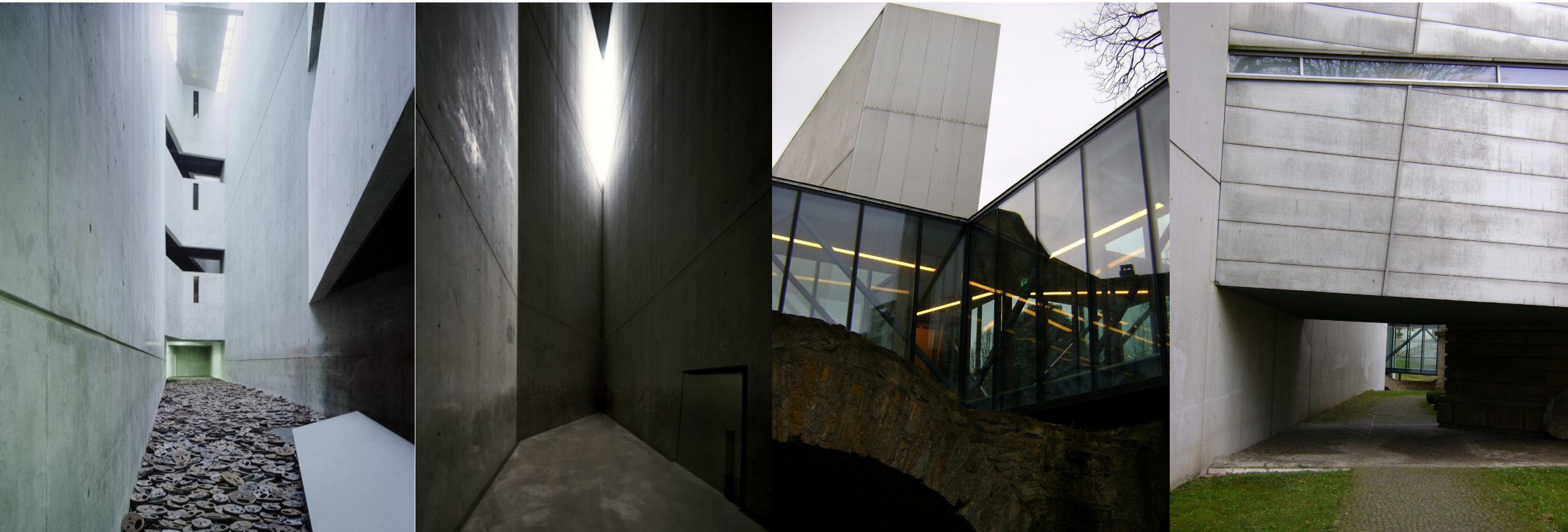
However it was at the Johnson Collection, a Soanian house museum in East Melbourne opened to the public in the same decade Miegunyah became a University of Melbourne property, that I began to recognise the complexity of the house-object interrelationship.¹⁷ The qualities of historical authenticity and personal character for which a house museum is most admired, bely what Risnicoff de Gorgas deems a 'dream space' – an environment defined more by 'poetics' than historical veracity.¹⁸ At the Johnson Collection my guide informed me that the house had been completely transformed since Johnson had lived there, the kitchen repurposed and then reconstructed (interestingly upon visitors' requests to see Johnson's "house"), undergoing constant metamorphosis alongside current programmes. I started to question the purpose of the historic interior.

THE JOHNSON COLLECTION EAST MELBOURNE



JOHNSON COLLECTION, Hotham St East Melbourne (established 1986); photographs: Katja Wagner 2018

DANIEL LIBESKIND (1946 -)



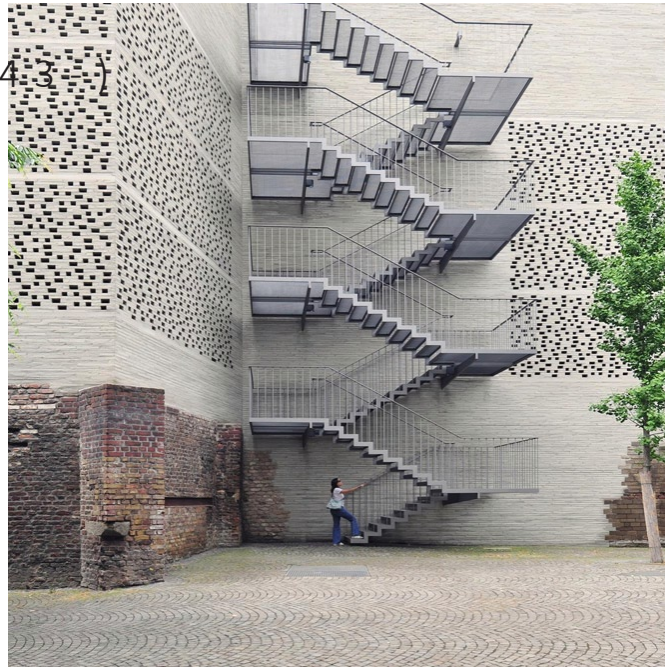
BERLIN JEWISH MUSEUM (2001) by Daniel Libeskind; photographs: < <https://libeskind.com/work/jewish-museum-berlin/> >

FELIX NUSSBAUM HAUS, Osnabrück (1998) by Daniel Libeskind; photographs: Katja Wagner 2016

Contextualisation, decontextualization and stylistic historicism are also points of architectural contention. Turning to the museum work of Libeskind, Zumthor and Scarpa reminded me of recapturing salient historical messages and meanings through the contemporary idiom. Israeli-American architect Daniel Libeskind's Berlin Jewish Museum (completed in 2001), and similarly the Felix Naussbaum Haus in Osnabrück (completed in 1998) powerfully confront the fractured pieces of German Jewish history, cutting an architectural space around a void, a violent absence.¹⁹ In a contrasting tone, Swiss architect Peter Zumthor's work such as at the Kolumba Museum in Cologne, moulds contemplative space to portray time with tacit understanding and archaeological sensitivity.²⁰ It was

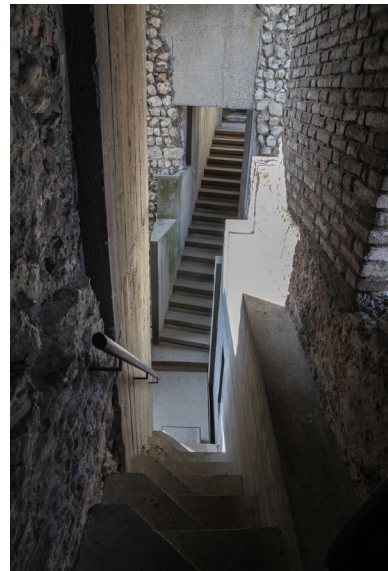
also through Zumthor's work that I was reminded of Grimwade the craftsman, disciple of the eucalypt and the timber joint. Italian architect Carlo Scarpa's exhibition design and architectural museum interventions are implicitly steeped in historical-cultural context. However it wasn't so much the drama of his reductive theatricality, but rather his use of the mechanism as a vehicle for poetic engagement with the visitor which resonates with Grimwade.²¹ Scarpa's understanding of history isn't laborious and apologetic but revealing of a deeper understanding of it as a living fabric. Similarly, in the words of biographer John Poynter, Grimwade was 'a man who valued both past and future, and saw the need to balance the demands of both while sacrificing neither to the other.'²²

PETER ZUMTHOR (1943 -)



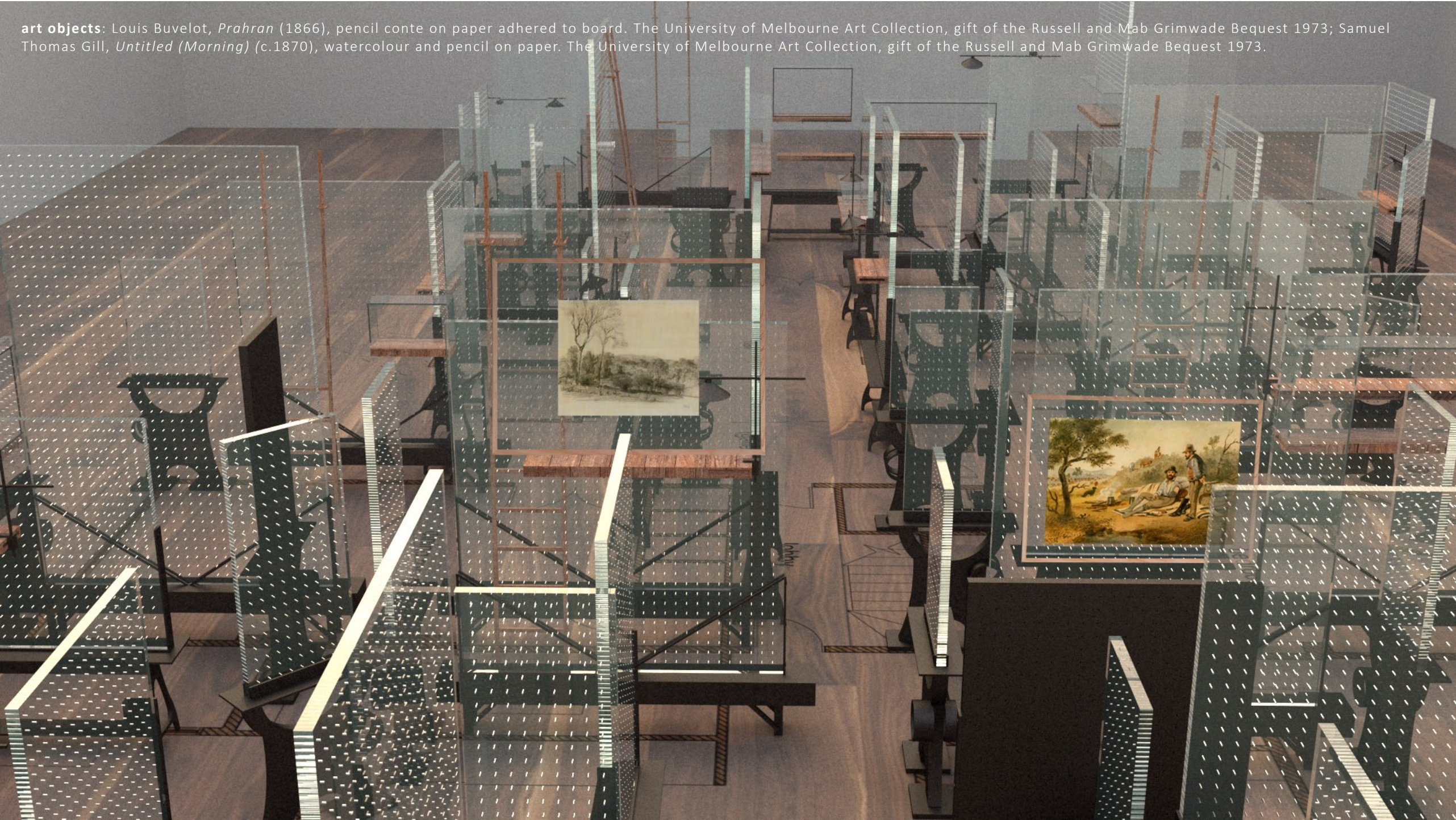
KOLUMBA MUSEUM, Cologne (2007) designed by Peter Zumthor; photographs: < <https://www.archdaily.com/72192/kolumba-museum-peter-zumthor> >

CARLO SCARPA (1906 - 1978)

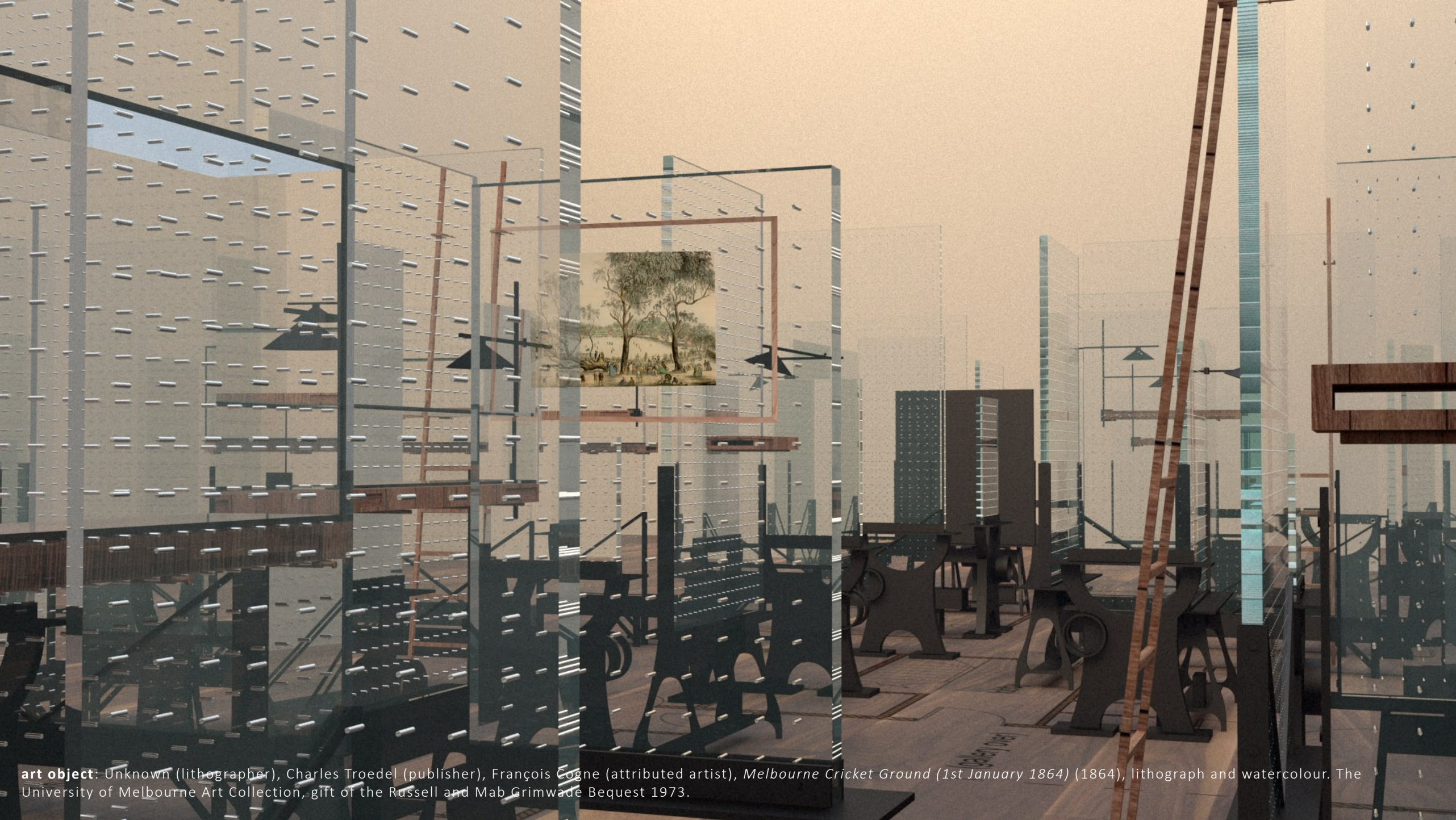


CASTELVECCHIO MUSEUM, Verona (1958-74) designed by Carlo Scarpa; photographs: < <https://archiobjects.org/museo-castelvecchio-verona-italy-carlo-scarpa/> >

art objects: Louis Buvelot, *Prahran* (1866), pencil conte on paper adhered to board. The University of Melbourne Art Collection, gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest 1973; Samuel Thomas Gill, *Untitled (Morning)* (c.1870), watercolour and pencil on paper. The University of Melbourne Art Collection, gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest 1973.



Traditional Japanese and Scarpaesque architectural devices of the tatami module, translucent screen, poetry of thresholds and engagement with history as reciprocal culture rather than a static past, led me back to Grimwade's scientific concern for classification, rationalisation, manufacture and the machine. To relocate Cook's Cottage from Yorkshire to Melbourne, each element was numbered, dismantled, crated and reconstructed.²³ Grimwade's collections are also redolent with an ordering energy, grouped and arranged like the gumnut specimens of his eucalypt cabinet.

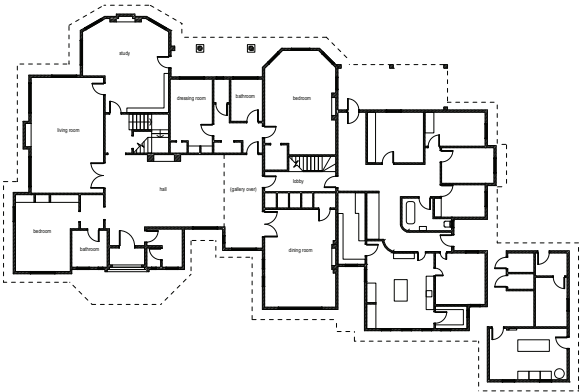
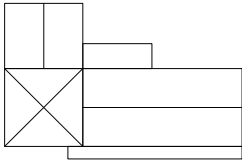


art object: Unknown (lithographer), Charles Troedel (publisher), François Cogne (attributed artist), *Melbourne Cricket Ground (1st January 1864)* (1864), lithograph and watercolour. The University of Melbourne Art Collection, gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest 1973.

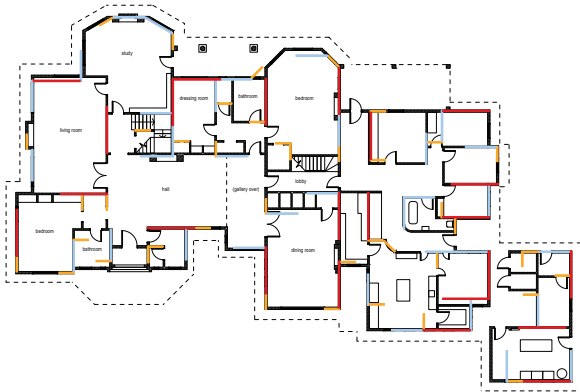
Hence in my spatial response to my research as a means of renewing the interface between the Miegunyah property and collection, I didn't attempt a reconstruction of the period interior, but through the eighteenth-century *Kunst und Wunderkammer* or 'curiosity cabinet' mode of display, I sought to adopt the language of Russell Grimwade's workshop as the architectural vernacular through which to explore the collection. Arranged in a manner which traces the ground floor of the house post-1934 in plan, stylised translations of machinery supports serve as plinths for objects. This fuses the cohabitation of enigmatic legend and analytical rigour which struck me as an indelible theme of the

collection. Grimwade lived in perpetual engagement with the real and the surreal through the duality of his work as a chemical entrepreneur and businessman, alongside his more ephemeral fascination with the mythology of Australian identity through Miegunyah, believing that 'In no other country [...] does the responsibility of preserving a knowledge of the past rest quite so heavily upon its people.'²⁴ The pedestals include the form but omit the purpose of the workbench, jigsaw and lathe stand, just as Grimwade's understanding of 'Australiana' included the adventures of explorers and the narrative of colonial development, whilst often omitting the violence of colonial conquest and expansion upon the First Australians.

P L A N N I N G



living room

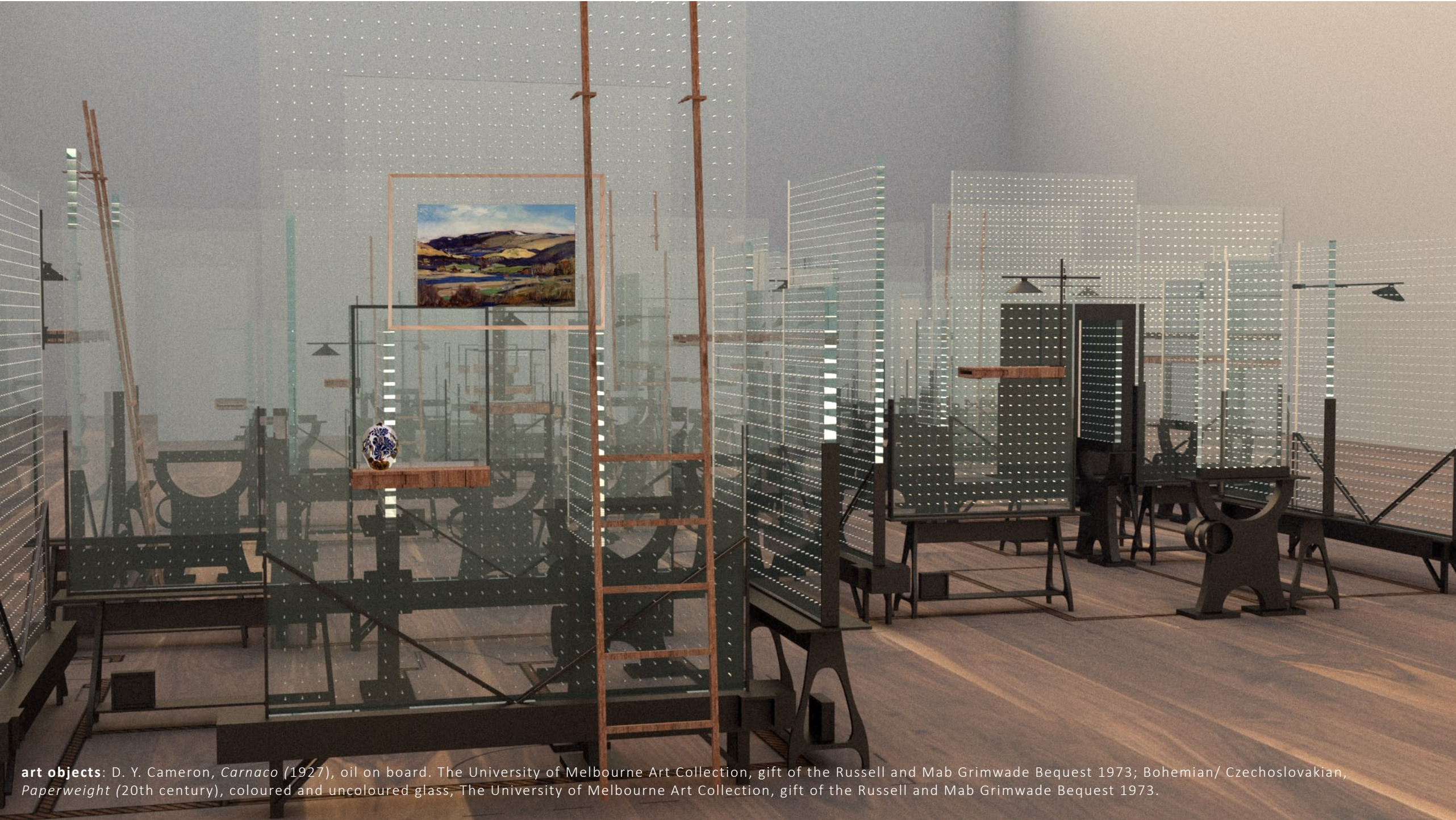


living room

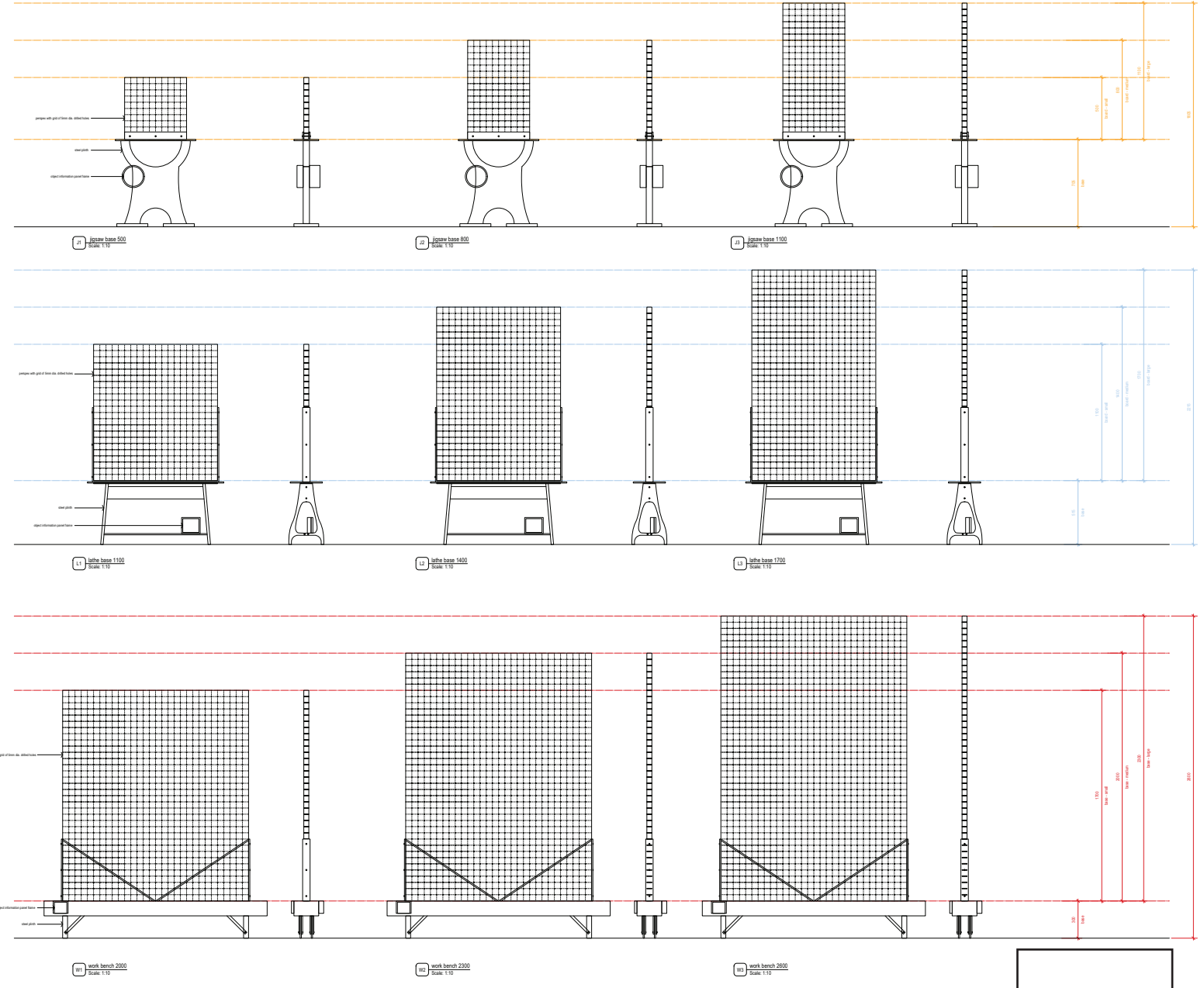
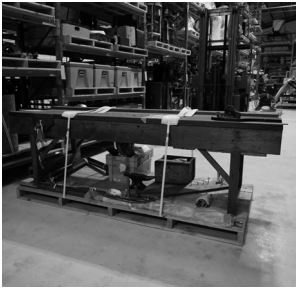
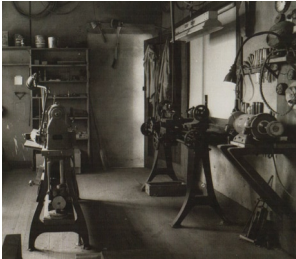






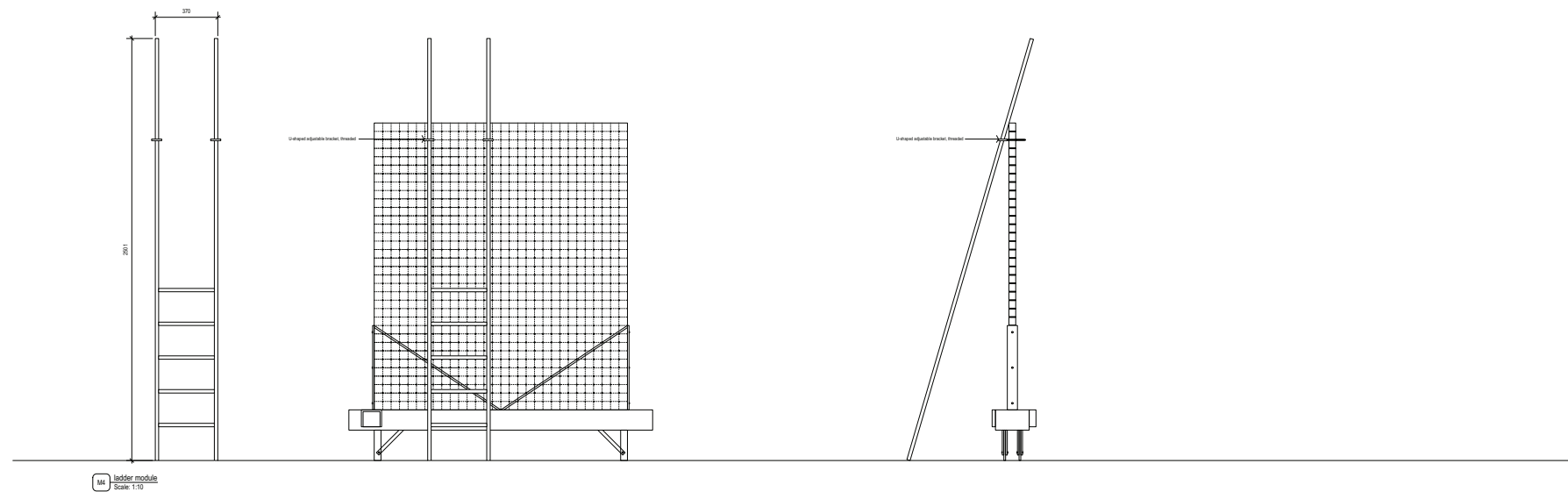
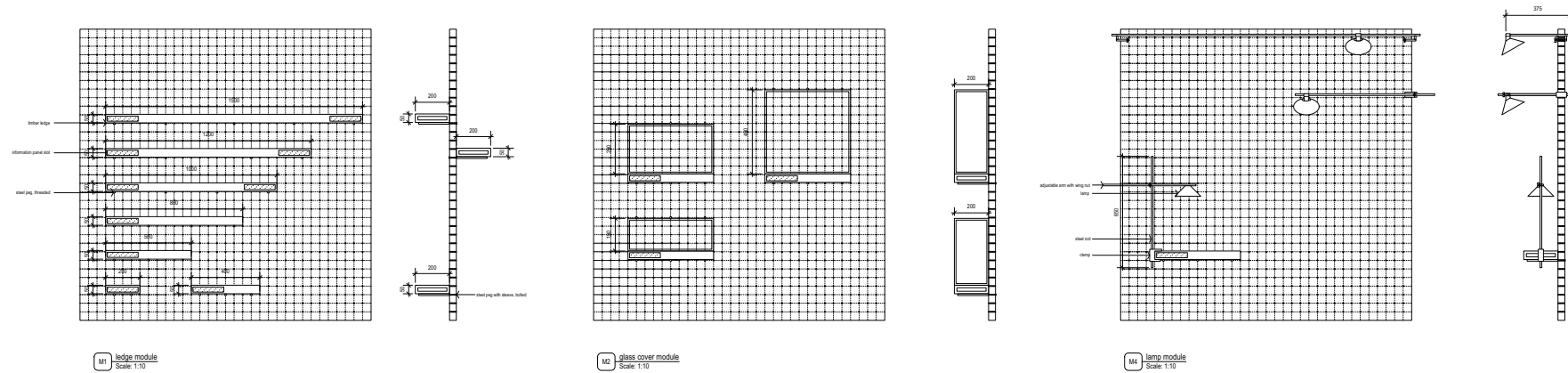


art objects: D. Y. Cameron, *Carnaco* (1927), oil on board. The University of Melbourne Art Collection, gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest 1973; Bohemian/ Czechoslovakian, *Paperweight* (20th century), coloured and uncoloured glass, The University of Melbourne Art Collection, gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest 1973.



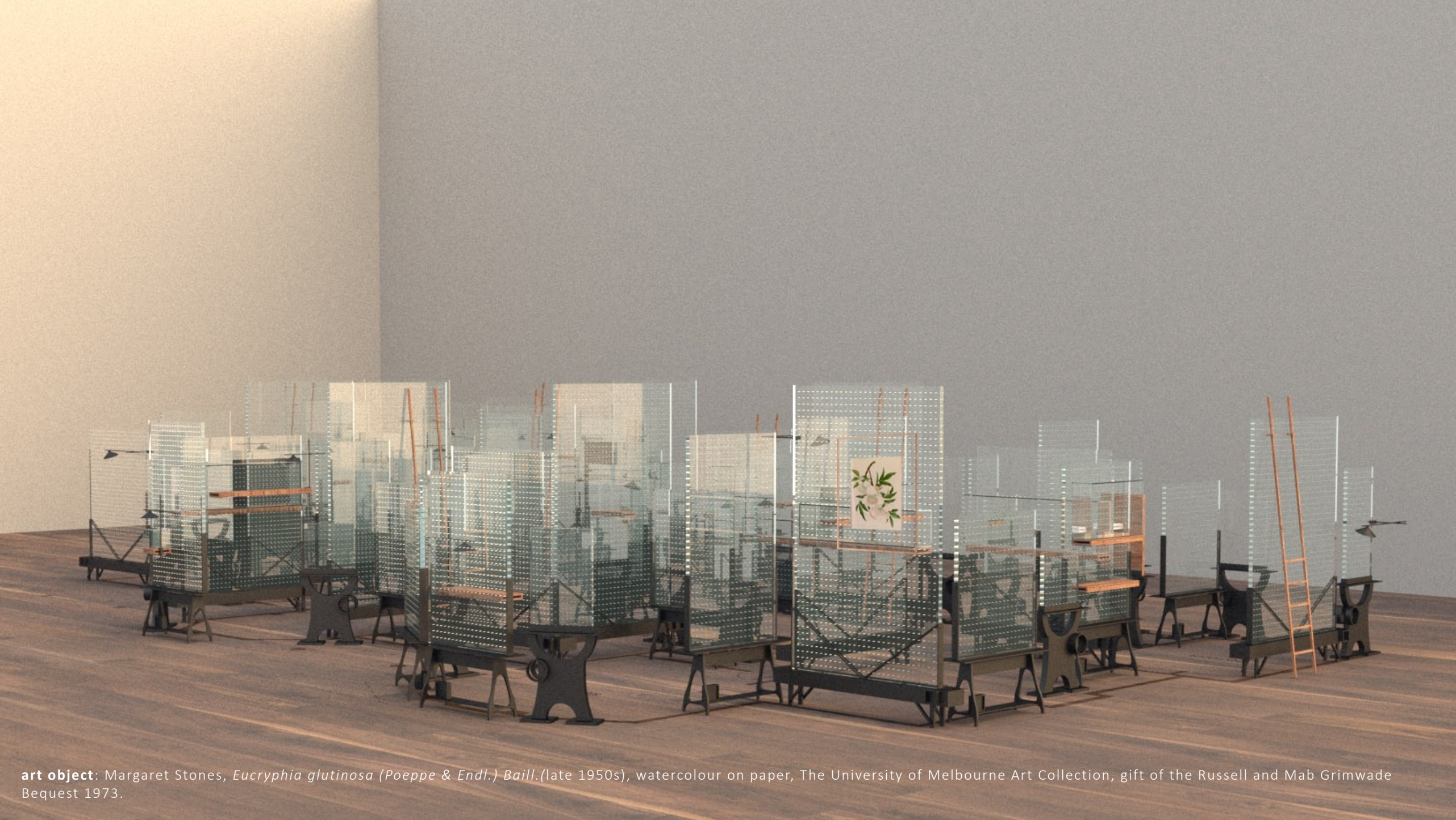
This structure of display also facilitates the motifs of exploration inherent in the *Wunderkammer* mode, furthered by a series of modular components recalling elements of the Miegunyah workshop. These include ledges or vitrines containing objects, timber observation ladders, adjustable lamps synthesising workshop task lighting and adjustable laboratory burette stands, timber observation ladders, and upright planes based on the perforated, wall-mounted chipboard panels used for tool storage which here use bolted pegs to secure framed works of art, documents or textual material. Being Perspex, these planes also enable a De Stijl or Miesian reading of diaphanous space as a limitless medium for the momentary suspension of objects held in examination, while further building upon motifs of adjustability and analysis by nature of

their flexibility as a system. The articulated nature of the stands as independent designed objects also contributes to the blurring of lines between the public museum and private house, if this distinction is defined as objects being separated from rather than placed directly upon surfaces, as McClellan suggests.²⁵ The use of hand-written object information panels resembling taxonomic labels in the form of a machinery component or workbench vice further contribute to this interplay, reminding the visitor of the hand of the collector and the personal nature of the art object.

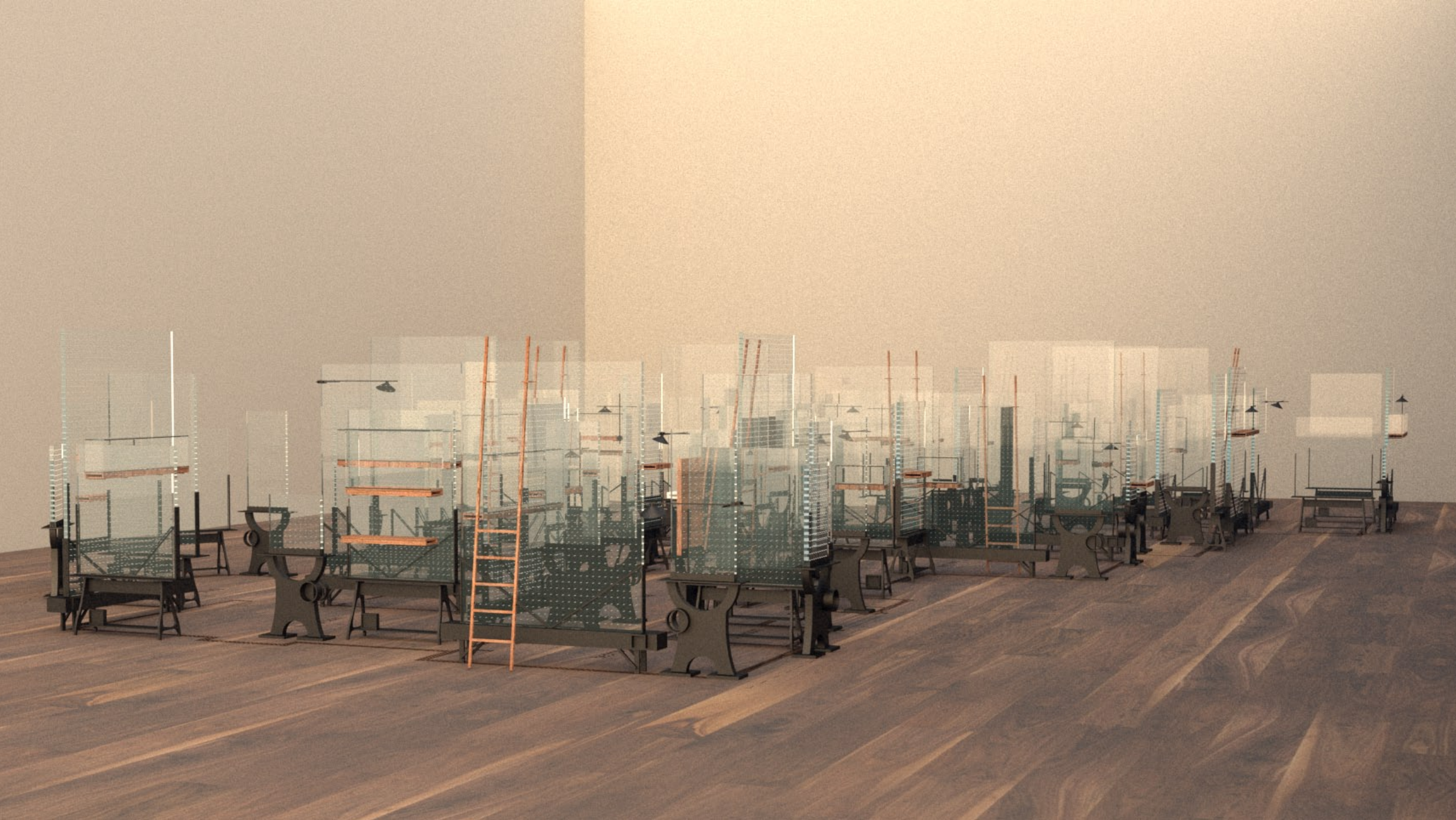


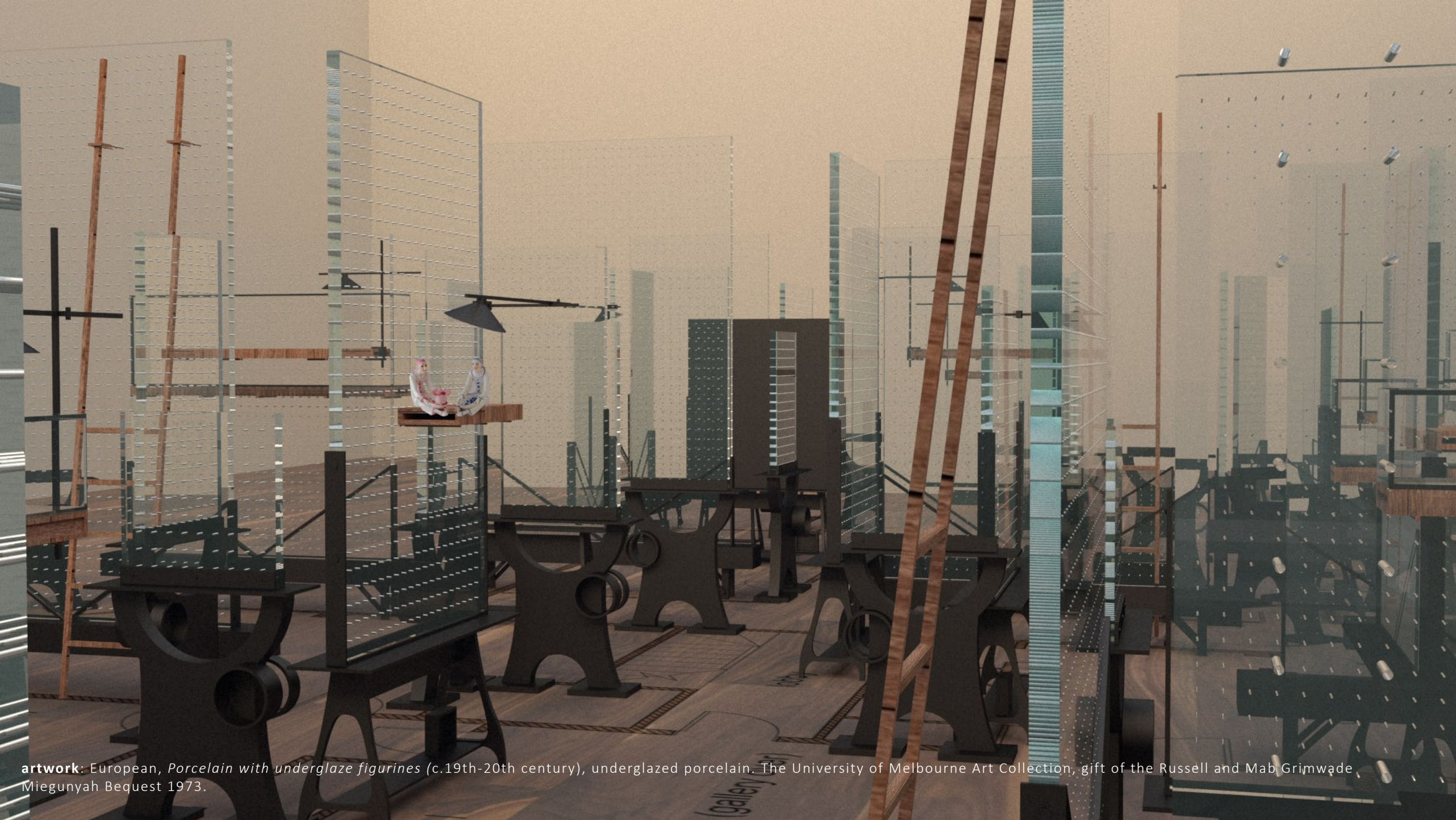


art objects: Sir Russell Grimwade, *Untitled (Eucalypt specimen photographic studies)* (n.d.), carbon prints. The University of Melbourne Art Collection, gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest 1973.



art object: Margaret Stones, *Eucryphia glutinosa (Poepp & Endl.) Baill.* (late 1950s), watercolour on paper, The University of Melbourne Art Collection, gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest 1973.





artwork: European, *Porcelain with underglaze figurines* (c.19th-20th century), underglazed porcelain. The University of Melbourne Art Collection, gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Bequest 1973.

Although the enduring legacy of Russell and Mab Grimwade's house on the Miegunyah collection is complex, I believe it worthy of consideration, particularly in light of the Grimades' vision for the house as the enduring repository and name of their collection. Drawing upon the workshop as the formal language and the house as planning device reasserts Miegunyah as a symbol of the Grimwades' fields of endeavour and exploratory impetus, whilst acknowledging the house museum as an agent of identity construction. However this is simply one solution, and it would be interesting in future to consider the role of Mab Grimwade (although her character is less historically perceptible), in addition to the impact of the garden landscape as the setting in which the collection rested. Thus I hope that this has rekindled a dialogue which will return to the Grimwades' Miegunyah as the binding medium of the Russell and Mab Grimwade 'Miegunyah' Collection.



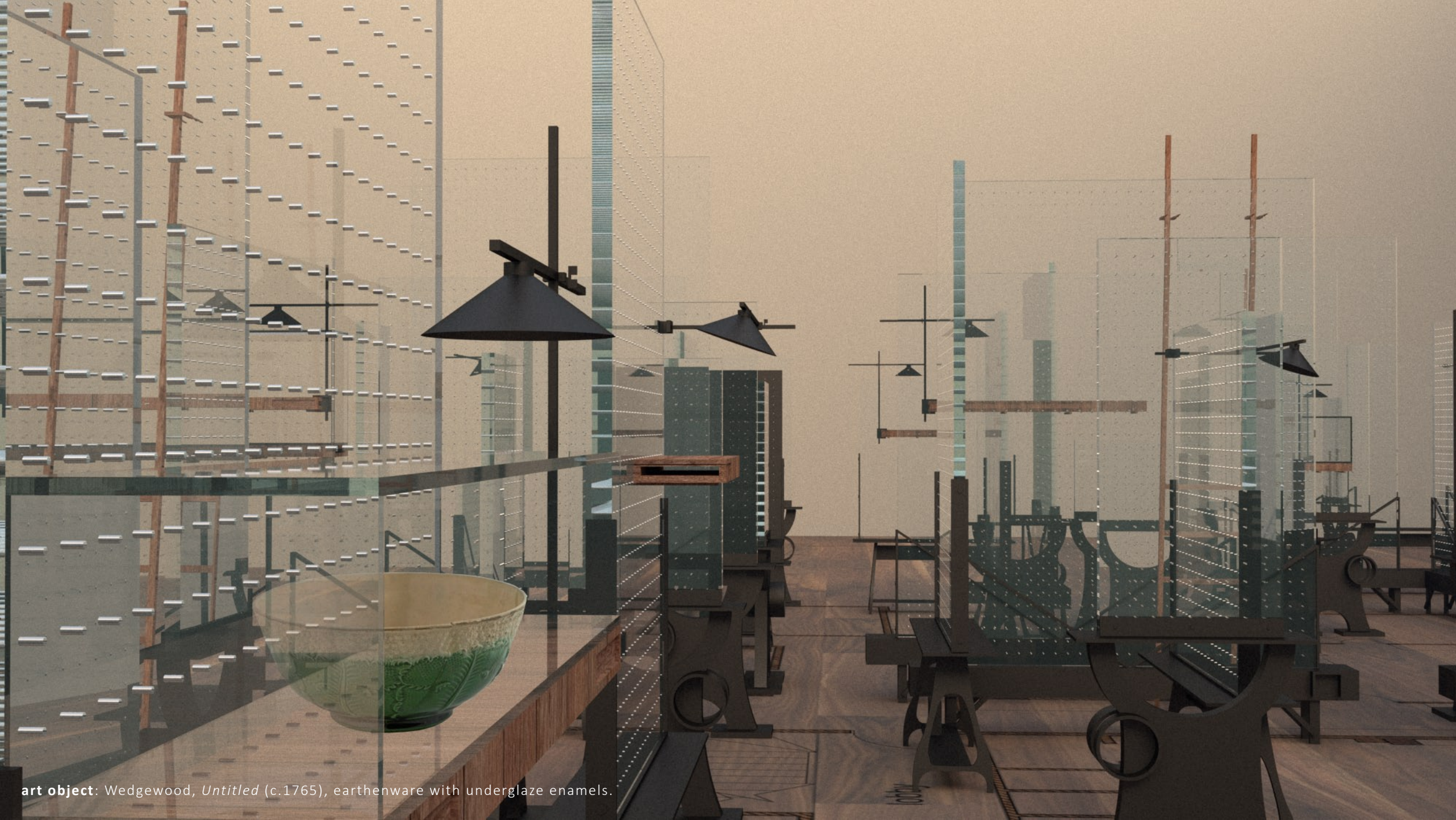
art object: Conrad Martens, *Toorak* (1860), watercolour and tempera on paper. The University of Melbourne Art Collection, gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest 1973.



art object: John Adamson, *Melbourne from the south side of the Yarra Yarra* (c.1840s), engraving. The University of Melbourne Art Collection, gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest 1973.



art object: *English glassware* (18th century), coloured glass; Louis Buvelot, *Untitled (Yard, Studley Park)* (c.1870), sepia ink wash on paper. The University of Melbourne Art Collection, gift of the Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest 1973.



art object: Wedgewood, *Untitled* (c.1765), earthenware with underglaze enamels.

I wish to conclude with two commentaries made by Daniel Libeskind reflecting upon his role in designing the Berlin Jewish Museum:

‘The Jewish Museum is conceived as an emblem in which the Invisible and the Visible are the structural features which have been gathered in this space of Berlin and laid bare in an architecture where the unnamed remains the name which keeps still.’²⁶

‘The task of building a Jewish Museum in Berlin demands more than a mere functional response to the programme. Such a task in all its ethical depth requires the incorporation of the void of Berlin back into itself, in order to disclose how the past continues to affect the present and to reveal how a hopeful horizon can be opened through the aporias of time.’²⁷



rear image Russell's workshop at 'Miegunyah', Toorak from Poynter and Thomas (2015) pp.122-23

ENDNOTES

¹ Museum of Art, 1989, p.iii.

² Victorian Heritage Database, URL: < <http://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/6137/download-report>>; Ian Potter Museum of Art, 2000, pp.10-11.

³ Poynter and Thomas, 2015, pp.139.

⁴ Poynter and Thomas, 2015, pp.v-vi.

⁵ Poynter and Thomas, 2015, p.101.

⁶ Kent and Aders, 1997, p.i; Lewis, 1986, pp.13-16.

⁷ Lewis, 1986, pp.9-13; Victorian Heritage Database, URL: <<http://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/30675/download-report>>.

⁸ Kent and Aders, 1997, p.11.

⁹ Poynter and Thomas, 2015, pp.108-119; MacMahon, 1997, p.5.

¹⁰ Lewis, 1986, p.8.

¹¹ Poynter and Thomas, 2015, p.121.

¹² University Gallery, 1987, pp.3-5; Victorian Heritage Database, URL: < <http://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/6137/download-report>>.

¹³ University Gallery, 1987, p.5.

¹⁴ Summerson, 1983, p.25; Poynter and Thomas, 2015, pp.76-77.

¹⁵ Poynter and Thomas, 2015, p.173.

¹⁶ The Spaces, URL: <<https://thespaces.com/alberto-giacomettis-studio-comes-to-life-in-paris/>>.

¹⁷ The Johnson Collection, URL: < <https://www.johnstoncollection.org/history> >.

¹⁸ Risnicoff de Gorgas, 2004, p.360.

¹⁹ Schneider, 2004, pp.26,48.

²⁰ Zumthor, 1998, p.286.

²¹ Plummer, 2016, p.105.

²² University Gallery, 1987, p.5.

²³ Rennie, n.d.

²⁴ University Gallery, 1987, p.3.

²⁵ McClellan, 'Collecting, Classification and Display', p.137.

²⁶ Schneider, 2004, p.6.

²⁷ Schneider, 2004, p.19.

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CONCURRENT EXPLORATIONS

DISCUSSION

- Dr Kyla McFarlane (Miegunyah, Grimwades, approach)
- Dr Olivia Meehan (Miegunyah, Grimwades, approach)
- Dr Alisa Bunbury (Miegunyah, Grimwades)
- Helen Stitt (Russell Grimwade & RACV)
- A/Prof. Andrew Saniga (Miegunyah landscape design)
- Prof. Philip Goad (contacted but unavailable)

SITE VISITS

- The Ian Potter Museum of Art (research, project information) | 3.07.18, 16.08.18, 31.08.18, 6.09.18, 7.09.18
- Cook’s Cottage (Grimwade initiative & example of his ideal of colonial legacy) | 27.08.18
- Johnson Collection (local, intact house museum) | 3.09.18
- University of Melbourne Reading Room (Miles Lewis 1986 report on Miegunyah property & article about 1997 in-situ Miegunyah exhibition) | 14.09.18
- Melbourne Museum Coburg storage centre (Miegunyah workshop contents) | 24.10.18

TALKS & PRESENTATIONS

- Dr Mike Bayley, ‘A Tale of Two Plant Collections, Russell Grimwade and Australian Eucalypts’ in Up From the Vaults series at The Ian Potter Museum of Art | 23.08.18
- Dr Alisa Bunbury on the Russell and Mab Grimwade ‘Miegunyah’ Collection at The Ian Potter Museum of Art | 8.10.18
- Dr Alisa Bunbury, ‘The Collectors: Australian Art in the Late 19th & Early 20th Centuries’ at Fitzroy Town Hall Reading Room | 7.11.18