

Art and Science? ... NGA!

Susie Bioletti and Philippa Winn

*National Gallery of Australia,
Canberra, Australian Capital
Territory, Australia*

As the premier art institution in Australia with over 90,000 works of art in its collection, the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) recognises that along with preservation and display, education and learning are integral to its purpose. People learn best when learning is fun and new information builds on what is already known and accepted. Science is fundamental to all aspects of life and provides a platform to build an understanding and appreciation of the visual arts.

The National Gallery of Australia contributes to the annual National Science Week with a programme of popular events such as *Conservators on the Floor* and *Expose Yourself to Science*. These interactive demonstrations attract and inform primary, high school and tertiary students as well as a general audience. Conservation tools, such as microscopes and the infra red vidicon, demonstrate how conservators examine and assess the condition of works of art. Visitors are introduced to issues of preservation and storage with works from the national collection undergoing conservation.

The National Gallery Education Department provides art discussion tours tailored to the interests of the group. Tours, focusing on science and art, are designed and



A workshop at NGA about the science and techniques of conservation.



Tools and materials of the art of illumination on display during the exhibition of the Book of Kells.



Pigments and materials used in the art of illumination.

promoted for National Science Week and are available throughout the year. Popular requests for discussion tours include *Art and the Environment* or *Recycling and Art*.

Conservators at the National Gallery of Australia regularly contribute articles to *artonview*, the National Gallery of Australia's quarterly magazine. These articles focus on materials and techniques used to create works of art. Written for the general reader they include the results of scientific analyses and anecdotal information. Conservators also present public lectures on a regular basis. These contributions and lectures engage the reader in the physical aspects of art and alert them to the key conservation projects undertaken in the laboratory at the Gallery.

Prominent scientists, science writers and broadcasters are invited to be part of the NGA Public Program. For National Science Week 2000 Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) personality Dr Norman Swan spoke about the meeting between science and art.

In Canberra art and science collaborate formally through "Metis" the exhibitions of science and art programme instigated in 1999. The National Gallery participated in "Metis" with an exhibition of Paula Dawson's holographic work *There's no place like home*. In 2000, "Metis II" will take the theme of waste and the National Gallery of Australia will again participate in this dynamic programme.

The recent exhibition, *The Book of Kells and The Art of Illumination*, incorporated pigments and tools to draw attention to the technical aspects of creating illuminated manuscripts. The science-art components of exhibitions and events at the Gallery, such as garden design and botany discussion tours of the Sculpture Garden and the Fiona Hall Fern Garden are always well attended and have proved extremely popular.

Susie Bioletti is the Senior Paper Conservator

Philippa Winn is Project Officer Education and Public Programs

The National Gallery of Australia, King Edward Terrace, Canberra, ACT, 2600, Australia

Email: philippa.winn@nga.gov.au