

AHSN-sponsored Event

Chau Chak Wing Museum (CCWM), The University of Sydney

Panel and Discussion of Comic Stereographs

Bringing the Laughter Home: Comic Stereographs in the Early 20th Century

Panel on the exhibition of comic stereographs and their viewing equipment

3 August 2023, 6.30-7.30pm

Program

Introduction: Jan Brazier (CCWM)

Chair: Jessica Milner Davis, The University of Sydney

Robert Phiddian, Flinders University: The Australian magazine and cartoon context: Technology and the availability of visual imagery in the home

Mark Rolfe, UNSW: The American-Australian context: Topics and social messages for entertainment

Will Visconti, UTS: Music-hall and the performative context: References, characters and scenes for the family

Q&A

Speakers' Bionotes

Robert Phiddian is Professor of English at Flinders University. He studies and writes about political satire, particularly the satire in Australian political cartoons and in 18th century writers like Jonathan Swift. He has been the Ross Steele AM Fellow at the State Library of NSW, and is presently working on a history of Australian editorial cartooning (contracted to Melbourne University Publishing). Robert is a member of the Australasian Humour Studies Network Review Panel,

Dr Will Visconti coordinates the Italian Major at the University of Technology, Sydney. An expert on music hall and burlesque, his first book was *Beyond the Moulin Rouge: The Life & Legacy of La Goulue* (2022, University of Virginia Press). Forthcoming publications include "The Monstrousness of Mae West" in *Post-Moral Humour in a World of New Gods and Old Monsters* (Tampere University Press), "The Myth of the Moulin Rouge" (in Routledge's *History of Paris since 1789*) and, with Matthew Kaiser, four edited volumes on 19th century humour and comedy (Routledge's Historical Resources series).

Dr Mark Rolfe is an honorary lecturer in the School of Social Sciences at the University of New South Wales where he taught for many years. He researches and publishes on Australian

and American politics, satire, rhetoric, populism and the process of Americanisation. His publications appear in *The Conversation* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* as well as in academic presses and he is co-editing a book on post-morality and humour (with Benjamin Nickl, Tampere University Press). Mark is a member of the Australasian Humour Studies Network Board.

Dr Jessica Milner Davis FRSN is an honorary research associate at The University of Sydney and at Brunel University's Centre for Comedy Studies Research. A member of Clare Hall, Cambridge, she has twice served as president of the International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS). Her many books deal with farce, satire, the European comic tradition and cross-cultural studies of humour in Australia, the UK, Japan and China. Jessica co-ordinates the Australasian Humour Studies Network.

Speakers' Abstracts

Robert Phiddian

The existence of stereographs speaks of a world of relative scarcity of visual images in the home. I will link this history to the parallel story of weekly magazines in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In these, hand-drawn illustrations and cartoons remained dominant until the gradual introduction of better technological means for reproducing photographs in newsprint. Until that happened, stereographs remained rare and remarkable things in domestic environments, giving them an exciting aura and creating a ready market.

Mark Rolfe

Nineteenth century stereographs may seem to be artefacts that are antiquated or mundane when compared to the sophisticated technology of our society. However, they can be understood as evidence of processes of Americanization that have always been part of the Australian story. I will demonstrate this by locating stereographs in the context of popular entertainment of the time and by examining their images, humour and catchphrases. These facets also give us important clues to how these simple devices tapped into popular culture of the time: they did this in ways that still exist in contemporary society.

Will Visconti

Throughout the late 19th and into the 20th century, some of the most prolific users of photography were performers, who recognised the medium as a means of publicising themselves or their performances. From the legitimate stage through to vaudeville, dance-halls and burlesque, *artistes* used photographs as merchandising and as marketing. Looking at examples from the collections held in the Chau Chak Wing Museum alongside examples produced in Britain, the United States and France, I will examine how performers and their fans engaged with each other through photography. This also raises questions about the implications for increased accessibility to public figures and the consumption of texts representing them.

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