

As it did for every cultural institution around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly raised significant issues for The Johnston Collection this year.

However, our team responded quickly to the challenge and, almost overnight, we were able to transform the way in which we worked and operated as a museum. When TJC closed its doors on the 18 March 2020 during the first Melbourne lock-down, the museum quickly pivoted (to use an over-used but apt word) to become a place where people could tour Fairhall exhibition-house, enjoy a lecture, visit the collection, and purchase goods in our shop, without setting foot in the building – or outside their home.

With the many challenges thrown up by the pandemic, the Trustees continued to focus – and perhaps more sharply than ever – on the long-term viability and future of TJC.

Collection Online

In November 2019 TJC launched its collection online. The culmination of five years of work by our CEO, Louis Le Vaillant, and a dedicated team of volunteers, the introduction of the Vernon Systems Collection Management software enabled the cataloguing and managing of the Collection's more than 1,900 objects and 2,200 Reference Library records. It also allowed the museum's catalogue to be uploaded to our website via Vernon Browser web module, providing universal access to our Collection for the first time. This was both timely and fortunate given the reduced access to the physical museum during the Melbourne lockdowns this year.

Program

Despite the many challenges presented by COVID-19 lockdowns, TJC was able to offer a breadth of excellent, diverse programs throughout the year. From April 2020 we began to present our lecture series virtually via Zoom. Visitors were able to continue to tour Fairhall and see our past and current exhibitions through TJC's YouTube channel. The AN INTERIOR LIFE | William Johnston & His Collection video achieved the highest ever number of views of an exhibition on our YouTube channel during this time. In part, the transition to online programs made it possible for the museum to achieve one of its core goals, to broaden and increase its audience.

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Planning Permit

We are still waiting for a recommendation from the City of Melbourne Town Planner regarding the application we lodged in 2019 to change TJC's opening hours. We believe the more flexible operating hours will also result in increasing and broadening our audience.

Trustees

Following a plan developed in previous years for the orderly retirement of longer serving Trustees, this year saw the retirement of Dr. Peter Watts AM, Chair of the WR Johnston Trust, and Mr. Peter Walsh, Trustee. Both Dr. Peter Watts and Mr. Peter Walsh commenced their tenure at TJC in 2008.

In his more than a decade as Chair, Dr. Peter Watts has overseen the revising of budgets, the scoping of operations, the long-term sustainability, the maintenance of standards, the relevance of exhibitions and programs, the encouraging and building of new audiences and the need to move into new directions – with an exactitude of detail and always with a straightforwardness and a consideration of “why are we doing what we do?”

Mr. Peter Walsh, a lawyer and Trustee of a number of Charitable Trusts and Foundations has offered sage advice to the Trustees and has been the Trustees representative for the Ambassadors.

On behalf of the Trustees, Ambassadors, The Friends, Staff, and Volunteers of The Johnston Collection I would like to wholeheartedly thank Dr. Peter Watts and Mr. Peter Walsh for the enormous contribution they have made over the last decade and more to The Johnston Collection.

This year we also welcomed the appointment of Tim Murphy as a Trustee. His expertise will be a valuable asset to the museum.

Finance

The financial performance for the year was principally affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with reduced income due to lower visitor numbers while, at the same time, expenditures could not be contained at the same rate as the income reduction.

We reported a net deficit of \$317,341 for the year. Total museum income decreased by \$36,053 at \$135,381 compared with the previous year. The reduction in operation income arose from a



combination of reduced admission fees and lower lecture income earned. Income from our retail SHOP and The Friends of TJC respectively reduced by \$6,320 and \$7,208 at \$61,042 and \$32,017 compared with last year. Income from OPENING DOORS fundraising also reduced by \$18,796 at \$34,341 due to cancelled and lower fundraising events for the year. However, this was completely offset by increased revenue of \$72,309 from federal and state government grants for COVID-19 business support funding.

TJC experienced a large reduction of \$180,365 in investment income as a result of the global economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the second half of the year. The COVID-19 lockdowns in Victoria led to business uncertainty, along with the cancellation of TJC's programs, fundraising functions, and The Friends events resulting in a significant decline in net cash flow from operations and investments in the second half of the year. However, the Trust does have sufficient cash reserves to continue operations.

Fundraising and Bequests

We continued our OPENING DOORS program but unfortunately fundraising events were cancelled due to lockdowns including our major fundraising event A Garden Party at the Melbourne Club in March 2020. In lieu of a refund many of those who had bought tickets to this event converted their tickets to a donation to TJC. We also sent out an emergency appeal in May 2020 through our e-newsletter, requesting donations to cover the unexpected loss of revenue and the costs involved in re-opening the museum after lockdown and providing a safe environment for our visitors and staff.

Overall, we received an overwhelming response from our supporters and communities with more than \$34,000 raised for the OPENING DOORS program this year. I would like to sincerely thank every donor for your support in helping to sustain us through the crisis. I would also like to thank Lisa Arrowsmith for her terrific leadership of our fundraising program.

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Shop

Revenue from our shop sales was less than the previous year but this was directly attributed to the much-reduced visitation due to the museum's closure during COVID lockdowns. However, our online shop sales increased significantly during the second half of the year with new stock added and a strong marketing campaign through our e-newsletters and social media. During the periods when the museum was closed, our Visitor Services staff were kept busy processing shop orders. It was very pleasing to see that our best-selling item was TJC's own product line of facemasks that were made in Melbourne for TJC.

Thanks

On behalf of the Trustees, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Staff, Volunteers, The Friends of The Johnston Collection, Ambassadors, Fundraising Committee and all our donors and supporters. Your passionate support, dedication, and sheer hard work have enabled us to succeed in what has been the most difficult year that the museum has ever faced. Without your support we could not have done it. I would like to specially thank our CEO, Louis Le Vaillant, for steering us so ably through 2020.

Dr Graeme L Blackman AO FTSE FAICD
CHAIR | The WR Johnston Trust

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