

MAAS Lace Study Centre

Introduction

The Powerhouse Museum has been collecting lace for over a century and has one of the best collections in Australia, ranging from fine handmade lace from the late 1500s to more recent machine-made pieces. The Lace Study Centre provides access to about 300 of the most significant examples of handmade lace in the Powerhouse Museum's collection. The pieces on display include bobbin, needle, and embroidered, crocheted, knotted and knitted laces from many different countries.

Visit the Lace Study Centre and view different styles of lace from all over the world, independently research pieces in the Powerhouse Museum's collection and find out more from the volunteer lace enthusiasts who staff the centre. Everyone with a passion for these intricate and extraordinary textiles is invited to use this unique resource, including lace makers, embroiderers and designers. The Lace Study Centre is an invaluable resource for students, particularly secondary students of design and technology, visual art, and textiles as well as tertiary students of fashion, design, jewellery, sculpture and textiles.

Lacemaking often conjures up images of gentle, nimble-fingered ladies quietly chatting and tapping their delicate ivory bobbins. And yet nothing could be further from the truth. Like any art form, the story of lace is rich and varied. Not only in terms of materials and techniques but also in the questions it raises about their lives, artistic practice and creative energy of countless women – for the majority of lace makers were, and still are, women.



This tiny lace rectangle in the Lace Study Centre tells the ancient story of the powerful Judith seducing Holofernes and then hacking off his head to save her city. The story's theme of lust and violence is enhanced by the use of bright red silk thread to indicate the blood gushing from Holofernes' neck. Made in England, mid 1600s.

Lacemaker and lace historian Rosemary Shepherd describes the Powerhouse Museum's collection of bobbin laces from the 17th and 18th centuries as some of the most beautiful textiles ever made. She says 'to naked eye they present an exquisite arrangement of different textures. Under a magnifier each texture reveals within it other textures – amazingly complex interweavings of threads which repeated faultlessly to produce the pattern'.