

# Presentation Abstracts

(in order of program)

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# A tall order: the vertical stretching of the curved Semakh diorama backdrop

Lightning talk

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Stretching a 3 x 10 metre canvas is a substantial undertaking under any circumstance, made even more remarkable when it must be carried out vertically along a significantly curved support. This presentation discusses the physical and logistical considerations of the task recently faced by the team at the Australian War Memorial.

After decades in storage, the large diorama depicting the 1918 battle in the town of Semakh, Palestine, was returned to display as part of the redevelopment of the Memorial's First World War galleries for centennial commemorations.

In 2013 a new backdrop for this diorama was commissioned by artist Alexander McKenzie, as the original painted backdrop, created by Louis McCubbin in the 1920s, was no longer in existence. Owing to its size being larger than the required entry and route into the heritage listed gallery, we insisted this backdrop be designed as demountable to prevent the need for damage or destruction if it is ever to be removed from the galleries in the future – an unfortunate outcome for several large diorama bases and backdrops in the past.



*Janet Hearne and Helen Gill working on the new Semakh backdrop*

To achieve this, the artist painted the landscape on an enormous single canvas attached to a solid support consisting of plywood mounted to curved metal framework sections constructed by Designcraft. Following removal of the canvas, these framework sections could be separated and the backdrop moved without damaging the artwork. Initially stretched as a blank canvas, the canvas was re-rolled after the artist had painted his landscape offsite, to avoid building works, and transported into the galleries. Due to inaccuracies in the curve of the solid supporting structure, modification was required before the canvas was re-mounted with the use of contact adhesive Lascaux 360 HV to achieve a secure, smooth and importantly, reversible attachment.

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Alana Treasure has been Senior Paintings Conservator at the Australian War Memorial for eight years, previously working at the National Archives of Australia and University of Canberra in both conservation and conservation science following her Bachelor of Science (Chemistry) and Masters in the Conservation of Cultural Materials, Paintings. She managed the diorama conservation project in the lead up to the FWW centenary. Alana is a Professional Associate at the University of Canberra and conducts Raman and FTIR materials analysis for many cultural institutions.

Janet Hearne is a Paintings Conservator with the Australian War Memorial, employed since 2009 upon graduating from the Melbourne University Masters of Cultural Material Conservation. Previous studies include a Bachelor of Fine Arts (UNSW) and Honours year (VCA). Janet has a special interest in contemporary artist materials and techniques, and frames conservation.

David Keaney has worked in conservation at the Australian War Memorial for 40 years. Since his retirement from the Senior Paintings Conservator role he has worked on contract with the Australian War Memorial and National Museum of Australia.