

# HOORAY FOR HOLLYWOOD

For a University of California film school graduate who has earned a profile on the internet movie database IMDb, Russell Briggs is quick to play down the Hollywood connection.

It's ironic, therefore, that one of his first assignments as the new director of exhibitions at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image happens to be bringing the internationally acclaimed Hollywood Costume exhibition to Melbourne.

"[Film school] was sort of an escape hatch to figure out something to do for a couple of years," he says. "Little did I know I'd end up drawing on it 20 years later."

The Los Angeles native arrived in Melbourne last November, and launched straight into organising the touring display of more than 100 iconic costumes from the world's best-loved films.

While his enthusiasm for the project is evident, the same cannot be said for his own career in film.

"If you [IMDb] search me, I show up as an apprentice editor on a Michael Cimino film," he says, laughing. "It's one line with no photo or anything, and that's it."

His journey from apprentice editor on a 1980s action flick to the helm of Australia's centre for screen culture involves a few professional twists and turns. After bouncing from screenwriting to producing music videos to a stint as a music journalist, Briggs got hooked on emerging technologies.

"My job was to create engaging environments for people in learning products and training, and I guess the whole idea of user engagement was the string that went from film school to working in museums."

Museums came after the dot com bubble burst, when Briggs began looking for a "big lifestyle change". The move from Los Angeles to the mid-sized township of Nelson, at the top of New Zealand's south island, more than delivered.

Eventually he found himself at the Auckland Museum, first as head of communications and new media, and finally as director of exhibitions and programs. Briggs says his role at ACMI knits together all the loose threads of his career.

"It just seemed like such an amazing piece of serendipity, combining the things I was doing at the beginning of my life – which I never thought I'd see again – with all that mid-career stuff about engaging and interactivity," he says.

It's a career trajectory that shifted from creating content to curating the work of others, but Briggs says it hasn't been much of a stretch.

"In my years of museums, I would say about half of what I've worked on has been content that's been brought in and needs to be localised and layered and made more interesting, and about half has been bespoke; creating something from nothing."

He cites ACMI's wildly successful *Game Masters* exhibition as a prime example of original content, hinting at the prospect of more self-produced shows as ACMI continues to grow as an institution.

For the moment, however, *Hollywood Costume* is commanding his full attention.

Curated by Academy Award-nominated costume designer Deborah Nadoolman Landis, the exhibition's debut season at London's Victoria and Albert Museum attracted more than 250,000 visitors; the museum's second-largest crowds in 20 years.

In Melbourne, Briggs and his team certainly won't be short on big-name content to work with: Judy Garland's gingham dress from *The Wizard of Oz* and Vivien Leigh's green velvet gown from *Gone With The Wind*



**PROFILE \** Russell Briggs has wasted no time in his new role at ACMI, writes JO DAVY



JUDY GARLAND \ THE WIZARD OF OZ



CATE BLANCHETT \ ELIZABETH



AUDREY HEPBURN \ BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S

"EVERY WEEK THERE IS A HUNDRED THINGS TO DO"

(SUPPLIED COURTESY OF ACMI)

are among the exhibition's biggest drawcards.

"Costumes are the intersection of a dialogue between a director and a creator that is most visceral for audiences," Briggs says of the importance of costumes to film discourse.

Perhaps the most powerful example of this imagery is Audrey Hepburn's little black dress from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* – Briggs' favourite piece of the exhibition.

"I love its simplicity. It's one of those costumes that you can just walk up to and experience a little shiver."

With his Californian drawl and easy laugh, it's impossible to imagine this man stressed, but he admits the contractual minefield that is safeguarding 100 of film's most iconic costumes from all over the world has been "a total slog".

Add to that the process of contextualising content for an Australian audience and Briggs has a few late nights ahead of him. "Localising is really important down here," he says.

"The amazing thing about the Australian industry – and this happens over and over again – is people don't realise the disproportionate impact that Australians have on these creative industries."

Briggs' enthusiasm for the monumental task of presenting these costumes to Melbourne seems to be eclipsed only by his passion for the city itself.

"I don't want to slog on Auckland," he says. "But coming from Auckland to Melbourne is like coming from nowhere to somewhere; it's just amazing."

"I guess we have to work a little harder down here because we're far away ... but it's sure paying off because I can't remember being anywhere – except possibly Paris or London – where there is such a continuous concentration of creative output."

"Every week there's a hundred things to do – I'm still getting used to it."

It looks like he'll have plenty of time to explore, because planning is under way for exhibitions in 2016.

But while Briggs has one eye on the future, the other is fixed on the present; that is Hollywood Costume and the major life decision of choosing an AFL team.

He's thinking Richmond, for the record. \

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» *Hollywood Costume* runs at ACMI from April 24 to August 18. [www.acmi.net.au](http://www.acmi.net.au)