

# **Collections Strategy 2019–22**

Endorsed by NGV Council of Trustees 2019

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## **1. Executive summary**

The following document provides analyses and strategic directions for building the National Gallery of Victoria's permanent collection, either through purchases, gifts or donation of funds for acquisitions. It should be noted that the Gallery's collections have been formed largely on the basis of donations from the community, most notably the Felton Bequest which was inaugurated in 1904. In addition, the State Government of Victoria provides a grant, matched by the NGV, as endowment for the Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists (VFLAA) which is used to acquire work by contemporary artists. More recently, the Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund has provided an outstanding source of support for contemporary major acquisitions and commissions.

## **2. NGV Collection overview**

The National Gallery of Victoria was founded in 1861. The State Collection illustrates the history and development of Australian, Indigenous and international art, design and architecture in all media. While not encyclopaedic in scope, the collection spans from antiquity to the present day. It is the only collection in Australia that coherently represents the history of Western art from 1100 CE through to the twenty-first century as well as the diversity of historical and, to a lesser extent, contemporary art practices across the Asian region. In total there are more than 70,000 works in the Gallery's permanent holdings.

The NGV Collection has been formed in large part through the generosity of its many patrons, and by the tastes and values of those who have helped support it over the past 158 years. As is to be expected, while the collection has particular strengths, its holdings of art from certain geographical areas or historical periods, including works from the Middle East, Africa and South-East Asia, remain underdeveloped by choice or due to lack of collecting opportunities.

We acknowledge that we are unable to be exhaustive in our scope. We note, for instance, that our collection of antiquities is relatively static due to collecting priorities in other areas. While we are open to donations of historical material from Africa that meet our accession policy, we do not anticipate this to be an area of strategic collecting in the near future. We will, however, more actively seek to expand our very small holdings of historical material from the Middle East. We will also acquire contemporary art from Africa and the Middle East. Our current collections strategy is guided by the desire to selectively enlarge our historical European holdings – especially art produced in the Post-Impressionist, Expressionist, Art Nouveau and Art Deco periods – through donations and targeted campaigns, to actively expand the geographical reach of our contemporary art collection and to increase representation of female and non-binary artists across collecting areas.

### **3. Key strategic priorities across collecting areas**

The following collecting areas are to be targeted as priorities during the 2019–22 period. These areas are tied to proposed exhibitions or displays; build on existing strengths of the collection; signal areas for development; or address significant gaps in the NGV Collection.

#### **3.1 Contemporary international art**

We will continue to collect contemporary international art that reflects developments in a range of practices, across emerging, mid-career and established artists. A key focus in 2019 is to continue to broaden our geographic representation of works across media from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific region while deepening our holdings of work by artists from Europe and the United States. These acquisitions will be displayed at NGV International, and acquisitions will be made towards the 2020 NGV Triennial exhibition. Works included in major single artist exhibitions in 2019 will be identified for strategic acquisition.

#### **3.2 Early to mid 20th-century European art**

Concerted efforts made in collecting Surrealist art mean that only strategic acquisitions need to be added to this area. We will continue to acquire German Expressionist art of secure provenance. Other key areas of interest include Art Deco, Constructivist, Cubist, Fauvist, Post-Impressionist, New Objectivist and Expressionist art. The acquisition of a landscape painting by Edvard Munch remains a particular focus. The addition of works by American modernist and abstract artists would significantly add to this area of the NGV Collection.

#### **3.3 Dutch 17th-century painting**

We hope to acquire a significant example of Dutch 17th-century trompe l'oeil painting for our Dutch galleries.

#### **3.4 Art Deco and Art Nouveau decorative arts**

Continuing to add select examples of Art Deco and, to a lesser extent, Art Nouveau decorative arts to these underrepresented parts of the collection will enable us to tell the stories of these important art movements in our collection displays.

#### **3.5 Mid century art and design**

The selective addition of international (especially American) and Australian art, decorative arts, design and works on paper from the 1950s–1960s will expand this underrepresented part of the collection and enable stronger collection displays.

#### **3.6 New media**

We will expand our collection of both international and Australian new media (now encompassing algorithmic and virtual reality as well as video-based works) to allow us to properly represent key artists and new developments in Gallery displays.

### **3.7 International contemporary commissions**

Works by significant international artists will continue to be commissioned for display spaces, including the prime Federation Court location, and as part of major single artist exhibitions, resulting in major acquisitions entering the collection. Commissioning new works for the 2020 NGV Triennial will be an opportunity for acquisitions of mid-career to senior international artists.

### **3.8 Australian contemporary commissions**

Artist commissions will substantially augment the Australian contemporary art and Indigenous art collections. Strategic identification of opportunities aligned with the presentation of group and solo artist exhibitions will result in collection legacies from the exhibition program.

### **3.9 Oceanic art**

We will strategically collect important examples of Oceanic art in both modern and customary materials. We will strengthen our holdings of contemporary Oceanic work across mediums. We will also develop our holdings of works by artists from the Pacific who are based in Australia.

### **3.10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art**

We will strengthen our collection of work by city-based artists, with a focus on south-east Australia, particularly Victoria, and develop our holdings of works in video, photography, weaving and installation. We will expand our representation of work from the Torres Strait and Queensland, and continue to augment our holdings of work from Arnhem Land and the Tiwi Islands. We will continue to actively build on our holdings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fibre art, weaving and jewellery and will aim to acquire one contemporary possum skin cloak annually.

### **3.11 Modernist Japanese art**

We will continue to acquire, prints, furniture and decorative arts from Japan from the 1920s to 1950s.

### **3.12 South and South-East Asian art**

The acquisition of high-quality works of art from the Hindu, Islamic, Jain, Buddhist and animist traditions of clear provenance, will provide the opportunity to connect areas of the Asian collection, illustrate narratives that expand our representation of the region and better utilise the existing collection. A special priority will be to collect Korean white ceramics, screens and textiles of the 19th and 20th centuries.

### **3.13 Contemporary design and architecture**

We will continue to strategically commission and collect important examples of 21st-century international and Australian object, product and communications design, architecture, architectural photography and models, contemporary jewellery, speculative and critical design.

### **3.14 20th-century non-Victorian Australian artists**

Works by 20th-century non-Victorian Australian artists will continue to be acquired either through acquisition or donation. Such additions may include Ian Fairweather and Howard Taylor, an early work by John Olsen, a major painting by Margaret Preston, significant works by Robert MacPherson and a key work by Brett Whiteley.

### **3.15 International and Australian fashion and textiles**

This significant aspect of our collection will be augmented by works and accessories by key Australian and international contemporary designers, and unique commissions will continue to fill gaps across the collection, with a special emphasis on international 18th- and 19th-century fashion and works from the 1960s to the present day.

### **3.16 English 16th-century painting**

The acquisition of a major Armada portrait from the court of Elizabeth I to anchor the Gallery's holdings of British 16th-century painting continues to be a priority.