

FRED WILLIAMS

INFINITE HORIZONS

ngv
National
Gallery of
Victoria



"I see things in terms of paint... I think that is my particular talent... It has always been a hope of mine that people would be able to see things in terms of paint."

Fred Williams, 1981

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On April 7 the National Gallery of Victoria opened the first major retrospective of Fred Williams's work in over 25 years.

Fred Williams: Infinite Horizons showcases over 100 works from this iconic Australian artist drawn from public and private collections in Australia and overseas, including many works that have never been on public display before.

The exhibition highlights Williams's strength as a landscape artist including important oil paintings and luminous gouaches that reveal his distinctive approach, and his ability to poetically convey a feeling of place.

Frances Lindsay, Deputy Director NGV, said: "This is a rare opportunity for visitors to see a comprehensive retrospective of this seminal Australian artist.

"In the late 1950s Williams was determined to paint what was widely considered a hopelessly outdated subject. In doing so he redefined how Australians view and understand our unique landscapes and became one of the most important Australian artists of the twentieth century."

Infinite Horizons is a reflection of one of Australia's most distinctive and recognisable artists providing new insights for those who are familiar with his work. This retrospective showcases the classic Williams works in various series alongside his non-anthology works.

In the 1960s, Williams often painted outdoors with gouache, subsequently working on his oil paintings back in the studio, often with a minimal palette. In the 1970s, however, he felt an urgent desire to paint outdoors in oil with vibrant colour, partly driven by his need to reinvent his art.

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Humphrey Clegg, NGV Coordinating Curator explains: "Although Williams was a modest man, he was ambitious for his art. He saw the Australian landscape as a vehicle for extending the possibilities of contemporary painting."

The vibrancy of Williams's palette reaches its peak in works inspired by the Pilbara. After visiting the West Australian region twice in 1979 he painted the Pilbara series in 1981 before his untimely death the following year. This series was generously gifted to the NGV by Rio Tinto in 2001; a number of the oil paintings and gouaches feature in this exhibition and a further seven works remain on display in the permanent collection at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia.

Infinite Horizons, on display in Williams's home city of Melbourne, includes the bush and desert landscapes that he is most commonly associated with and also presents his fascination with water, in works featuring seascapes, ponds, creeks, billabongs and waterfalls.

Visitors to the exhibition will engage with a stunning range of Williams's paintings inspired by unique Australian locations, from Upwey in Victoria to the Pilbara in Western Australia and Weipa in North Queensland.

Also of great interest in the exhibition are the portraits Williams produced throughout his career. Initially trained at the National Gallery School in Melbourne Williams was adept at depicting the figure and these works show an artist engaged with his subjects, and intrigued by a sense of his sitter's individuality.

Fred Williams's body of work holds the highest significance in Australian art history and is comprehensively presented in this major exhibition that comes to the NGV from the National Gallery of Australia. Curated by Deborah Hart, Senior Curator, Australian Painting and Sculpture post-1920 at the NGA who says of the exhibition:

"*Infinite Horizons* provides insights into Fred Williams's unique take on the Australian environment. It includes major international loans from the Tate in London, and numerous works from Australian collections which have not been displayed publicly prior to this retrospective."

Fred Williams: Infinite Horizons will be on display at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Federation Square. 10am–5pm (closed Mondays), from 7 April – 5 August 2012. Admission fees apply: Adult \$16, Concession \$12, Child \$7.50.

For more information about the range of informative programs that accompany the exhibition or to buy tickets online please visit www.ngv.vic.gov.au.

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Image caption:

Fred Williams

Iron ore landscape 1981

oil on canvas, 152.0 x 182.4 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

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