

24 MAY 2011

NGV UNVEILS MAJOR ANNIVERSARY GIFT

Celebrating Australia's premier art gallery's 150th anniversary

Today, 24 May 2011, the National Gallery of Victoria celebrates its 150th birthday.

To honour this tremendous milestone, the NGV today unveiled an exceptional gift of 173 important Indigenous works of art including three by contemporary artists Vernon Ah Kee, Brook Andrew and Jonathan Jones who were commissioned to create works that pay homage to the highly celebrated Wurundjeri artist, William Barak. These pieces have been gifted by the Felton Bequest, established in 1904 by the NGV's greatest benefactor, Alfred Felton.

The Honourable Alex Chernov, AO, QC, Governor of Victoria and Mrs Elizabeth Chernov were present at the NGV's unveiling ceremony.

Dr Gerard Vaughan, Director, NGV said: "This is the most significant gift of Indigenous art to the NGV since the Gallery opened its doors for the first time on this date 150 years ago in country of the Kulin nation. It is appropriate on this date both to honour the memory of Alfred Felton and also celebrate the Indigenous art of our country, the world's oldest continuous visual tradition."



Sir Andrew Grimwade CBE, Chairman, Felton Bequests' Committee, said: "The Felton Bequest is proud to make these really significant gifts of Indigenous visual culture to celebrate the NGV's 150th anniversary. Since the Felton Bequest was founded in 1904, it has continuously supported the NGV, striving to enhance and strengthen the NGV Collection. The Felton Bequest is honoured to have contributed over 15,000 works to the Collection for the benefit of the public."

The gift of 173 works encompasses two exceptional collections: the first comprises 63 nineteenth and early twentieth century shields on display as part of the Australian Art collection, and the second 107 twenty-first century paintings from the Far Western Desert, forming the new exhibition *Living Water*.

Dr Vaughan said: "This outstanding gift adds tremendous strength to the NGV's collection of Indigenous Art. Since the NGV first collected Indigenous art, the collection has grown to hold over 3,000 works representing cultures across Australia.

"These exciting and dynamic acquisitions will enable the NGV to continue to educate visitors of all ages about the visual art of Indigenous Australians. This gift is a highlight of the NGV's 150th anniversary year, reminding us of the crucial and continuing role the NGV has played in collecting and displaying the finest art works that can be acquired.

"The Barak Commissions pay tribute to one of the most important figures of nineteenth century Australian Indigenous art, acknowledging Barak's central place in the history of Victoria and the NGV," said Dr Vaughan.

-continues-

NGV NEWS

ngv
150
YEARS

William Barak was born in country of the Wurundjeri people and became a leading Indigenous artist and figure in Melbourne during the 19th century. He is said to have witnessed John Batman 'purchase' Melbourne in 1835.

The multi-media installation by Vernon Ah Kee presents conversations between prominent Indigenous people as they reflect on how Barak has inspired them. Brook Andrew, renowned for his multi-disciplinary works, has created a powerful installation which adorns the entrance atrium at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia. Jonathan Jones, who works with fluid and dancing light as a metaphor of living culture, has created five light boxes that map important cultural designs belonging to Barak as a way of honouring Barak's life.



The collection of 63 rare and stunningly beautiful 19th and early 20th century shields is largely contemporary with Barak's life. The shields serve to remind us of the time when the plains of Southeast Australia contained carved trees bearing elegant inscriptions, with people dressed in possum-skin cloaks and carrying elaborate shields living extraordinary living in harmony with country and ancient beliefs.

The *Living Water* exhibition unveils the Felton Bequest gift paintings: 107 adventurous works by male and female artists from newly established art centres in the Far Western Desert, an area stretching across far flung parts of Western Australia and South Australia.

This exhibition of 21st century art highlights today's momentous art movement which originated at Papunya in 1971 when senior men decoded their archival narratives and laws, forging a new form shared by many Indigenous peoples across the Western Desert.

In 2008 the NGV launched the fundraising campaign Masterpieces for Melbourne aiming to raise \$150 million by the 150th anniversary year. These exciting gifts are part of this ongoing campaign.

Dr Vaughan said: "To celebrate the NGV's 150th anniversary, everyone is invited to a huge community event on the weekend of 28 and 29 May. Over the NGV 150 pARTy weekend, we are bringing the Gallery's Collection to life in amazing and creative ways. There will be free activities for people of all ages including live music and roving performers."

These Felton Bequest gifts will be on display at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia from 24 May until late 2011. 10am–5pm, closed Mondays. Free entry.

Visit ngv.vic.gov.au for more information about the NGV 150 pARTy weekend on the 28 and 29 May.

-ends-

NGV Partner – Indigenous Art: Qantas Airways

Media contact:

Sue Coffey, Media and Public Affairs, 03 8620 2346 / 0417 558 511 / sue.coffey@ngv.vic.gov.au

Jemma Altmeier, Media and Public Affairs, 03 8620 2345 / 0417 575 088 / jemma.altmeier@ngv.vic.gov.au

Image captions:

1. **Yunkurra Billy Atkins**, Putjarra born c1930s, *Kumpupirntily (Lake Disappointment)* 2005–08, synthetic polymer paint on composition board, 165.0 x 91.6 cm, Felton Bequest, 2011
2. **Unknown**, Queensland, *Shield* early 20th century, earth pigments and natural pigments on wood, 59.5 x 29.4 x 8.1 cm, Felton Bequest, 2011

