

Thursday 19 March 2009

EMBARGOED UNTIL 10.30AM, THURSDAY 19 MARCH

NGV to acquire John Brack's masterpiece, *The bar*



The National Gallery of Victoria today announced that the NGV has acquired John Brack's outstanding work, *The bar*, with support from the Victorian Government.

The painting, which the NGV sought unsuccessfully to purchase at auction in 2006, was offered to the Gallery for acquisition by Tasmanian collector David Walsh, who purchased it at public auction. *The bar* is widely regarded as the companion painting to John Brack's *Collins St., 5p.m.*, one of the NGV's most popular works with the visiting public.

The painting has been purchased with a loan of \$2 million from the Victorian Government to the NGV, to enable the Gallery time to raise funds to meet the purchase price of \$3.2 million – the same amount for which it was purchased by David Walsh, in 2006.

The NGV has already secured pledges of \$1.2 million towards the overall purchase price. The Government's generous advance to underwrite the balance of the price has allowed the NGV to acquire this crucially important icon of Melbourne.

The NGV will now mount a public appeal to secure the remainder of the funds, allowing the Government advance to be repaid.

In making the announcement, NGV Director Dr Gerard Vaughan said he was thrilled that the NGV has acquired *The bar*:

"This represents one of the NGV's most important acquisitions of a 20th century Australian work of art, and we are grateful to the Government for enabling the Gallery to purchase the work with a repayable loan. We are also very grateful to those private supporters of the NGV who have already pledged donations to the fund.

"The painting is an essential acquisition for Victoria. *The bar* will hang alongside its companion piece, *Collins St., 5p.m.*, and will be available for all visitors to enjoy in perpetuity. This painting belongs in Victoria, and when another opportunity to acquire it was presented, we were determined to ensure success this time.

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NGV NEWS

“We are very cognizant of the goodwill of the vendor, who has not only offered us the picture at the price he paid three years ago, but has allowed us time to search for funds, and to put a viable financial plan in place.”

“I am delighted to be able to announce that *The bar* has already arrived. From today on it will always be available for the public to see and enjoy.

“I am now also announcing that the NGV is launching a public appeal to secure the picture, and we encourage and invite support from the whole community.

“On 24 April 2009 the NGV will be opening the first retrospective of John Brack’s work since his death, with over 150 outstanding works. *The bar* will unquestionably be a major highlight of the exhibition”.

John Brack is widely considered one of Australia’s greatest artists. He painted images which explored the social rituals and realities of everyday life, and his work reflected a lifelong interest in people, human nature and the human condition. He also had an important connection with the NGV, eventually becoming head of the National Gallery School in 1962, a position he resigned to in 1968 in order to return to full time painting.

The bar was painted in 1954 and was Brack’s largest oil painting to date. Considered radical for the time, *The bar* presents a stark view of life in Melbourne suburbia, the infamous ‘six o’clock swill’ as patrons hurry to finish their drinks before early closing time. It is also an ironic take on Edouard Manet’s important 1881 work, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergere*.

Collins St., 5p.m. was completed a year later in 1955 and purchased by the NGV in 1956. Like *The bar*, *Collins St., 5 p.m.* exemplifies the style for which the Melbourne-based artist is renowned.

“This is a great moment for the NGV and for all Victorians”, said Dr Vaughan.

“It will be wonderful to have both paintings hanging side by side for visitors, now and into the future”.

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IMAGE CAPTION: John Brack, Australia 1920–1999, *The bar* 1954, oil on canvas, 96.4 x 140.0 cm, NGV acquisition © Helen Brack