

John Davis: Presence

6 August – 24 October 2010

In reality, I make one work over my life, so that when it's all finished, there are a number of parts or contributions to an overall piece, each linking to another in some way. John Davis, 1989

This August, the National Gallery of Victoria will celebrate the work of influential Australian artist, John Davis (1936–1999).

John Davis: Presence draws together over 40 works by the artist including sculpture, photography and installations.

David Hurlston, Curator, Australian Art, NGV, said this important survey charts Davis's development as an artist, from his early works, produced during the 1960s, through to his critically acclaimed sculptures and installation works leading into the nineties.

"At the core of his practice, particularly evident in his late works, was an awareness of ecology and a sensitivity to the elemental forces of nature and the effect of human actions. Now, at a time when issues relating to the environment seem more pertinent than ever, Davis's sculptures have even greater resonance.

"John Davis was a pioneering Australian artist who during his life achieved a critically acclaimed international reputation as a sculptor and installation artist. This important exhibition has a particular focus on the artist's interest in found and fragile organic materials, and the powerful evocation of the landscape," said Mr Hurlston.

A highlight of the exhibition is a series of works featuring fish. From the mid 1980s, Davis used fish in his work as a symbol for human movement and relationships with each other and the environment. Davis commonly referred to his fish as 'nomads' or 'travellers' and once described his works as 'a metaphor for people and the way we move around the world; a statement for diversity'.



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Frances Lindsay, Deputy Director, NGV said: “Davis’s mature works reflected his sensitivity to the landscapes that surrounded him. Visitors will be excited by the vision of this extraordinary artist as they explore his development from the early sixties through to his death in 1999. This exhibition is a special tribute to one of Australia’s great conceptual and environmentally aware artists.”

Born in Ballarat, Victoria, in 1936, John Davis studied at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. In 1972 Davis travelled to Europe and America before returning to Australia the following year to take up a position at Prahran College of Advanced Education. In subsequent years Davis was a senior faculty member at the Victorian College of the Arts and continued to travel widely and exhibit regularly in America, Japan and Australia.

John Davis was awarded a number of prizes, among them the 1970 Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture and the Blake Prize for Religious Art in 1993. He participated in the inaugural Mildura Sculpture Triennial, and he represented Australia at the Venice Biennale in 1978. Davis was also the first artist whose work was profiled in the NGV *Survey* series in 1978.

John Davis: Presence will be on display at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Federation Square from 6 August to 24 October 2010. The exhibition will be open 10am–5pm, closed Mondays. Entry is free.

A comprehensive catalogue featuring essays by David Hurlston, Charles Green and Robert Lindsay will be available in the NGV Shop.

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Image caption: John Davis Australia 1936–99 *Evolution of a fish: Traveller* 1990 twigs, cotton thread, calico, bituminous paint 110.0 x 130.0 x 18.0 cm
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