



## MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

MEDIA CONTACTS: MEDIA AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS, NGV

MARION JOSEPH | 03 8620 2346 | 0427 147 999 | [MARION.JOSEPH@NGV.VIC.GOV.AU](mailto:MARION.JOSEPH@NGV.VIC.GOV.AU)

ELISABETH ALEXANDER | 03 8620 2347 | [ELISABETH.ALEXANDER@NGV.VIC.GOV.AU](mailto:ELISABETH.ALEXANDER@NGV.VIC.GOV.AU)

# The Language of Ornament

NGV International | 24 February 2017 – December 2017 | FREE



The evolution of the ornament and the reinterpretation of common design motifs including shells, scrolls, flowers and mythical creatures will be explored through Western design tradition in *The Language of Ornament*, opening 24 February, NGV International.

Featuring more than 90 works from the NGV Collection, this exhibition will include classic antiquities, eighteenth-century Wedgewood ceramics, and twenty-first and twentieth century modernist ornaments, to investigate the appearance and reappearance of fifteen common ornamental motifs and design themes that have been reimagined over centuries.

Tony Ellwood, Director, NGV, said, '*The Language of Ornament* navigates the rich history of ornamental design through a range of mediums and art movements to chart the origins and reemergence of design motifs across time. This exhibition highlights not only the changing vocabulary of ornamental ideas, but also offers a reflection of the historical and cultural shifts that have shaped the Western World through art and design elements.'

*The Language of Ornament* will trace the origins of the *Putto* figure, a young male child often depicted with wings, dating from Classical antiquity, and a popular motif from the Renaissance period onwards. Represented in the exhibition with *The Four Seasons* by Mennecy, the eighteenth century French porcelain factory, and later by Austrian ceramicist Michael Powolny, the *Putto* figure has continually reappeared throughout history and its modern incarnation as the twentieth century *Kewpie* doll has cemented itself into popular culture.

The shell, renowned for its decorative and exotic form, is often associated with Aphrodite the Greek god of love and her Roman counterpart Venus. Contemporary Australian artist Janet Beckhouses' reinvention of the shell is the *Crustacean Ginger Pot*, with the Chinese-inspired vase enraptured in shell like forms. A nineteenth-century Worcester vase and works by contemporary glass artist Dale Chihuly are paired with Beckhouses' work, inciting dialogue about the translation of the shell as an ornamental device across time and continent.

The *Tea and Coffee Service* designed by the American architect Michael Graves exemplifies his highly decorative approach to design in the 1980s. It directly challenged those long-held modernist principles of clean, streamlined forms with minimal decoration through its referencing to earlier styles and playful use of colour and materials, the sky blue plastic for the finials, the mock ivory for the handles and the black bakelite for the feet. Graves's *Tea and Coffee Service* exemplified the latest trends in post-modern design as celebrated by the Memphis design studio.

The exhibition will also draw from the NGV's renowned collection of Wedgewood ceramics to present ten exquisite examples from the English manufacturer. The NGV's Collection features notable early Wedgewood ceramics dating from early eighteenth century, with the pieces drawing design cues from ancient Greek and Roman vases, a prime example of design motifs recurring through the ages.

*The Language of Ornament* is on display at NGV International from 24 February to December 2017. Open 10am – 5pm. Free Entry.

### MEDIA CONTACTS:

Marion Joseph | 03 8620 2346 | 0427 147 999 | [marion.joseph@ngv.vic.gov.au](mailto:marion.joseph@ngv.vic.gov.au)

Alexa Viani | 03 8620 2088 | 0422 614 364 | [alexa.viani@ngv.vic.gov.au](mailto:alexa.viani@ngv.vic.gov.au)

**Image Caption:** Manifattura Figli di Giuseppe Cantagalli, Florence (manufacturer)  
Vase c.1897 earthenware 58.5 x 28.8 x 28.7 cm National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, 1897 (386-D2)