



Collections Strategy 2016–19

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1 Executive summary

The following document provides analyses and strategic directions for building the National Gallery of Victoria's permanent collection either through purchases, gifts or donation of funds for acquisitions. It should be noted that the Gallery's collections have been formed largely on the basis of donations from the community, most notably the Felton Bequest which was inaugurated in 1904. In addition, the State Government provides a grant, matched by the NGV, as endowment for The Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists (VFLAA) which is used to acquire work by contemporary artists. More recently, the Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund has provided an outstanding source of support for contemporary major acquisitions and commissions.

2 NGV Collection overview

The National Gallery of Victoria was founded in 1861. The State Collection illustrates the history and development of Australian, Indigenous and international art, design and architecture in all media. While not encyclopedic in scope, the collection spans from antiquity to the present day. It is the only collection in Australia that coherently represents the history of Western art from 1100 CE through to the twenty-first century and the diversity of historical and, to a lesser extent, contemporary art practices across the Asian region. In total there are more than 73,000 works in the Gallery's permanent holdings.

The NGV Collection has been formed in large part through the generosity of its many patrons, and by the tastes and values of those who have helped support it over the past 155 years. As is to be expected, while the collection has particular strengths, its holdings of art from certain geographical areas or historical periods remain – through choice or lack of opportunity – underdeveloped, including art from the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

We acknowledge that we are unable to be exhaustive in our scope. We acknowledge, for instance, that our holdings of Pre-Columbian art and antiquities are relatively static due to collecting priorities in other areas. While we are open to donations of historical material from Africa that meet our accession policy, we do not anticipate this to be an area of strategic collecting in the near future. We will, however, more actively seek to expand our very small holdings of historical material from the Middle East. We will also acquire contemporary art from Africa and the Middle East. Our current collections strategy is guided by the desire to selectively enlarge our historical European holdings – especially art produced in the Expressionist, Post-Impressionist, Art Deco and Art Nouveau periods – through donations and targeted campaigns, and to actively expand the geographical reach of our contemporary collection.

3 Strategic priorities by department: overview

3.1 Asian art to 1980

The NGV has outstanding collections of historic Asian Art. In addition to continuing our longstanding commitment to collecting Chinese and Japanese art, the Gallery needs to sustain and increase its focus on collecting traditional works from India, Korea and South-East Asia.

3.2 Australian painting, sculpture and decorative arts to 1980

The collection of Australian art to 1980 documents the development of painting, sculpture and decorative arts in Australia from the time of European settlement, and consists of approximately 1500 paintings, 200 sculptures and 1250 decorative arts objects, including ceramics, metalwork and furniture). The NGV's collection of 19th-century Australian art is outstanding, with particular strengths in the 1850s–80s (for example, paintings by Eugene von Guérard and Louis Buvelot) and 1880s–1900s periods. By comparison, Australian art of the first half of the 19th-century is poorly represented. Our collection of 20th-century art is good, with artists including Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale, Fred Williams and John Brack represented in great depth; however, the focus is often on Victorian, especially Melbourne-based artists, and this imbalance should be addressed.

3.3 Contemporary art

The NGV Contemporary Art department encompasses Australian and international art and is responsible for the development and care of the NGV's contemporary art collection, which includes painting, sculpture, installation, video and (Australian) ceramics. Whereas in Australian art the 'contemporary' designation includes works dating from 1980 to the present day, in international art the focus is on work created in the late 20th and 21st centuries. The responsibility for collecting and caring for mid 20th-century painting and sculpture is shared with the department of International Art.

3.4 Photography

The NGV began collecting international and Australian photography when it established a department of Photography in 1967. Since then the department has acquired around 3000 international photographs, representing some of the leading practitioners in the history of photography. It also holds a strong collection of Australian photography that currently comprises around 14,000 photographs. Works included in the Photography department's collection encompass some of the earliest photographs made in the early 1840s, to contemporary photography.

3.5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art

The NGV has been seriously collecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art since 1984, always with a clear focus on acquiring contemporary works of gravitas, ahead of the market. We acquire works of impeccable provenance and documentation and outstanding aesthetic quality by named Indigenous artists who merit representation. Our collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works is notable for its breadth, depth and quality, but it is not encyclopedic in scope. Our holdings of prints and drawings, photographs, video, fibre art and weaving, contemporary installations and work from the Torres Strait, Queensland and the South-East Australian need continuing attention.

3.6 Oceanic art

The NGV has a developing collection of Oceanic art, primarily from Melanesia, acquired since 1970 from cultural gifts. Since 2000 the Gallery has augmented and enriched its holdings by making a number of judicious purchases of significant works and bodies of work by known artists. The NGV strives to acquire contemporary works by artists in Australia, New Zealand and throughout the Pacific region.

3.7 International decorative arts

The NGV is unique among Australia's public art galleries for its sustained commitment to developing an outstanding, representative collection of international decorative arts. The collections chart the development of European, and especially British, design from the late Middle Ages (13th-century) to the present day. American works are also collected to a lesser extent, with the focus here being on the 20th-century. The collection numbers nearly 7000 works and encompasses ceramics, glass, metalwork, jewellery, furniture and woodwork, with major strengths in numerous areas, most importantly Italian Renaissance maiolica; 18th- and 19th-century Wedgwood; 17th- and 18th-century British glass; and early 20th-century Viennese works. The British collections are historically rich and, in general, priority should be directed towards developing the collections of non-British decorative arts, with the recognition that from time to time British works will be sought to fill strategic gaps.

3.8 Contemporary design and architecture

The department of Contemporary Design and Architecture focuses on exploring, collecting and presenting the most interesting trajectories of design and architecture today. This new collection area will enable the Gallery's holdings of both Australian and international design to be brought up to date and will expand our collecting brief to include contemporary architecture and new formats of design content. Specifically, collecting responsibilities will encompass the allied fields of contemporary architecture and design, with a responsibility to strategically collect important examples of contemporary international and Australian jewellery, industrial and product design, graphic design and architecture (including digital content, models, drawings, photography and prototypes). Initial collecting will focus on filling gaps in the collection of Australian and international furniture and object design (1980–2000) by identifying significant Australian and international works from the period.

3.9 Mediterranean antiquities

The NGV has historically collected in the areas of Egyptian, Ancient Near Eastern, Cypriot, Greek and Roman cultures. The collection numbers approximately 1000 works. Highlights include Egyptian funerary objects from the predynastic to late Roman period; Iranian bronzes, seals and ceramics; and Cypriot ceramic vessels from the Bronze and Iron Age periods. The Gallery's collection of Greek and South Italian vases is one of the finest in the country and represents all the major centres of production. It was developed from the mid 1950s to the early 1990s, with vases being purchased by the Felton Bequest under the guidance of Professor A. D. Trendall. The Gallery also has four excellent examples of Roman sculpture, including the early Roman *Torso* which is undoubtedly the most outstanding example of ancient Classical sculpture in Australia.

3.10 Fashion and textiles

The NGV's international fashion and textiles collection focuses on fashionable dress and accessories from the 17th-century to the present day, as well as textiles from the 7th century to the present, including Coptic weavings, lace, carpets and tapestries. The broad strategy is to address major gaps in the collection by acquiring important works across the breadth of the collection and to continue the program of ambitious acquisitions in the area of contemporary international fashion.

3.11 International painting and sculpture to 1980

The scope of the international painting and sculpture collections is extremely broad, both geographically and in chronological terms. It ranges from the early Middle Ages to 1980, and covers Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States and, to a lesser extent, New Zealand art. This historically encyclopedic approach was enabled by the strong purchasing power of the Felton Bequest and has facilitated the acquisition of 1300 paintings and sculptures, including many great masterpieces, such as works by Hans Memling, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, Rembrandt, Titian, Auguste Rodin, Claude Monet, Mark Rothko and Francis Bacon. It is our aim to both fill some of the collection's obvious gaps, as well as build upon its obvious strengths through the targeting of specific areas.

3.12 Prints and drawings

The NGV's collection of prints and drawings is the largest of the Gallery's many collections, numbering over 23,000 works and spanning seven centuries, from the 1400s to the present day. The greatest distinction and strength of this collection are the holdings of European works, particularly before 1800, which are the finest and most comprehensive in Australia. Through these the history of Western art from the late Middle Ages to now can be charted, and the achievements of William Blake, Albrecht Dürer, Francisco Goya and Rembrandt, among so many others, can be studied in depth. The collection is also outstanding for its representation of the history and development of the graphic arts in Australia, from settlement to the present, with superb examples and core groups of great strength.