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**WHO ARE YOU:
AUSTRALIAN PORTRAITURE**

25 MARCH – 21 AUGUST 2022
IAN POTTER CENTRE: NGV AUSTRALIA



WHO ARE YOU: AUSTRALIAN PORTRAITURE

EXHIBITION FACT SHEET

This fact sheet provides information specific to *WHO ARE YOU: Australian Portraiture* to support the study of VCE Studio Arts – Art Industry Contexts Unit 4, Outcome 3. For a more detailed overview of exhibition preparation, presentation, conservation and promotion at the NGV refer to [Art Industry Contexts at NGV](#).

Howard Arkley
Nick Cave 1999
synthetic polymer paint on
canvas (support: 175.2 cm x
135.2 cm depth 4.3 cm)
National Portrait Gallery,
Canberra

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

WHO ARE YOU: Australian Portraiture is the first exhibition to comprehensively bring together the collections of both the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), Melbourne, and the National Portrait Gallery (NPG), Canberra. It is also the largest exhibition of Australian portraiture ever mounted by either the NGV or the National Portrait Gallery and is the first time the two galleries have worked collaboratively on such a large-scale project. *WHO ARE YOU* considers portraiture in Australia across time and media, and the role of this genre in the development of a sense of Australian national identity. Entry to the exhibition is free.

The exhibition is scheduled for display at the NPG from 1 October 2022 to 29 January 2023.

NUMBER AND TYPE OF WORKS

The exhibition includes more than 230 works: paintings, photographs, works on paper, sculpture and audio-visual. Seventy-nine belong to the NPG and 160 to the NGV.

KEY ARTISTS

Vernon Ah Kee, Howard Arkley, Atong Atem, Brook Andrew, Peter Drew, Joy Hester, Tracey Moffatt, Vincent Namatjira, John Nixon, Polixeni Papapetrou, Patricia Piccinini and Kaylene Whiskey.

KEY PERSONNEL

Planning, presenting and promoting an exhibition involves a project team of staff from many different teams across the Gallery. In preparing and presenting *WHO ARE YOU: Australian Portraiture* the project team involved key members from both NGV and NPG including:

NGV Curators: David Hurlston, Sophie Gerhard, Beckett Rozentals and Hannah Presley (former Curator of Indigenous Art)

National Portrait Gallery curators: Joanna Gilmour and Penelope Grist

Exhibition Designer: Jessica Brent

Exhibition conservator: Catherine Earley and NGV material specialist conservators

Marketing coordinator: Matilda McKenna

Max Martin

Portrait group 1922

oil on canvas 152.8 x 102.2 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased through The Art Foundation

of Victoria with the assistance of

Dr Joseph Brown AO OBE, Honorary

Life Benefactor, 1995

1995.564 © Veronica Martin



CURATORIAL RATIONALE

WHO ARE YOU: *Australian Portraiture* questions what constitutes a portrait - historically, today and into the future. The connection between the artist, sitter, and viewer is considered throughout the exhibition, creating opportunities for new perspectives to emerge from this relationship.

The curators have organised the works into five key themes, each one occupying a separate area of the exhibition space.

Person and Place examines the connection between identity and the land on which we live.


Meet the Artists celebrates self-portraits and portraits that artists have made of fellow artists.

Intimacy and Alienation reflects on love, family, friendship, isolation, mourning and nudity.

Inner Worlds considers how identity can be perceived through psychology, imagination, surrealism and fetish.

Icons honours the sitter portrayed in each portrait, emphasising who is remembered and who has been forgotten.

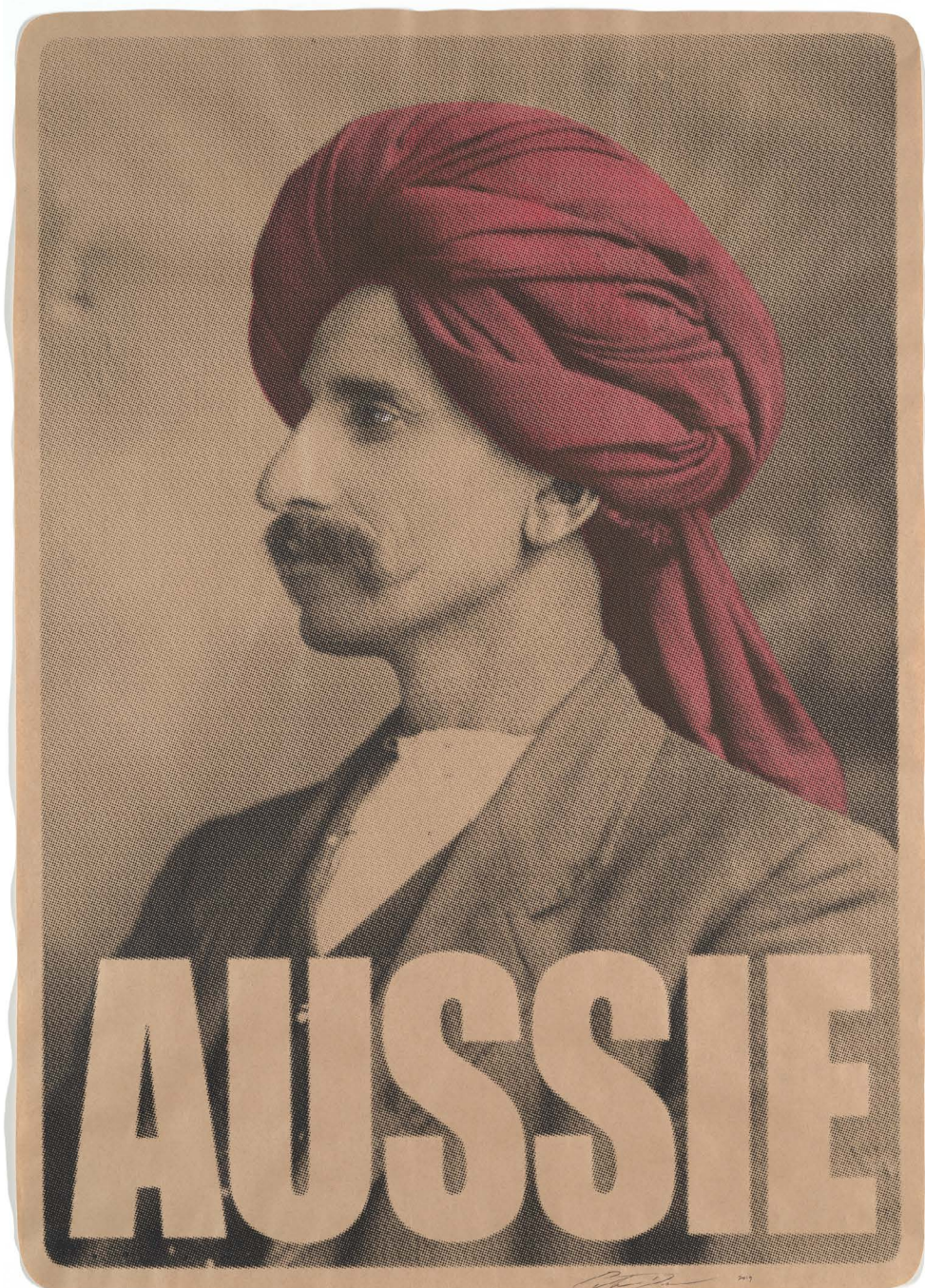
IN THE GALLERY

An illustration on a light yellow background shows two stylized figures. On the left, a person with dark skin and short dark hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and dark grey trousers, stands with their back to the viewer, gesturing with both hands towards the right. On the right, an older person with white hair, wearing a dark grey jacket over a blue long-sleeved shirt and blue trousers, stands facing the first person. Three dark blue speech bubbles are positioned between them. The largest bubble, coming from the person on the left, contains the text: 'How does the arrangement of the selected works reflect the curatorial rationale and enhance your understanding of themes and ideas?'. A smaller bubble, coming from the person on the right, contains the text: 'What measures have been taken to support and protect works?'. A third bubble, positioned between them and slightly lower, contains the text: 'What was done to prepare and present key works?'.

How does the arrangement of the selected works reflect the curatorial rationale and enhance your understanding of themes and ideas?

What measures have been taken to support and protect works?

What was done to prepare and present key works?



SELECTED WORKS

PETER DREW, *MONGA KHAN* 1916 2016; 2019 FROM THE AUSSIE SERIES 2016

In 2016, Adelaide-based street artist Peter Drew (b. 1983) travelled around Australia to paste up 1000 posters that he created featuring a 100-year-old photo of a man named Monga Khan. Monga Khan migrated to Australia in 1895 and made a living as a hawker in regional Victoria. In 1916, he applied for an exemption to a dictation test that was a part of the White Australia Policy. A section of the test required non-European migrants to write down a passage of fifty words as dictated by the immigration officer. Migrants who failed the test could be deported.

STATEMENT ABOUT KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Peter Drew's poster has been displayed unframed to replicate the look of 'paste-ups'. Made from paper and attached to walls and other surfaces in public places, 'paste-ups' are a common form of street art. However, in the interest of conserving Drew's work, no part of the poster itself has been secured to the wall.

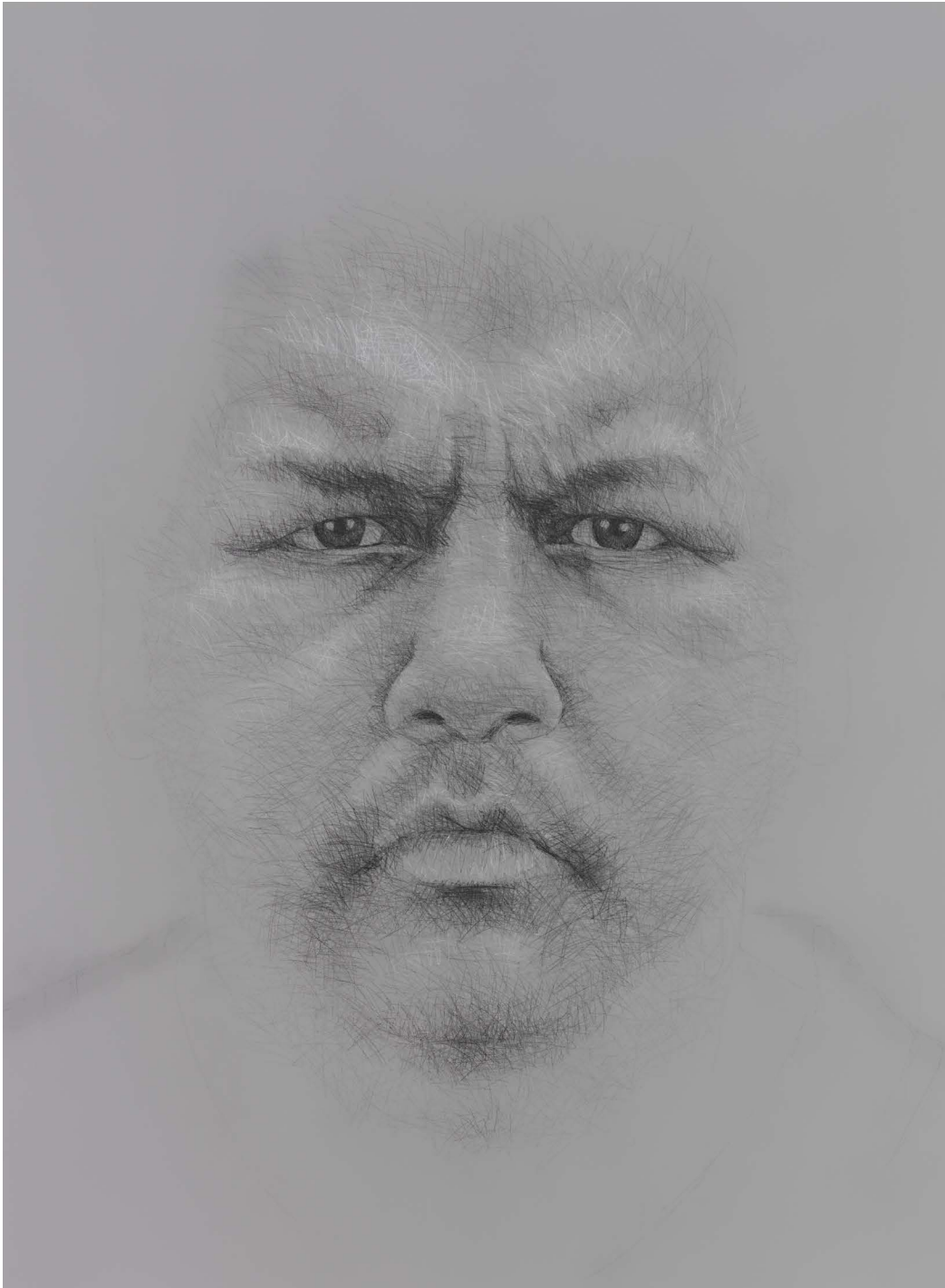
Prior to display, the poster was fitted with long strips of medium-weight Japanese paper known as hinges. These were attached to the poster with starch paste. The hinges are positioned on the back of the poster along the top edge, towards the left and right edges and in the centre. The paper hinges are clamped to the wall with stiff mountboard. This mountboard is then screwed into the wall. To remove it from the wall, the poster is carefully lifted from the lower edge and the mountboard unscrewed. The paper hinges remain attached to the poster for its next display.

Throughout the exhibition, a number of works have been carefully paired with others to support and enrich the curatorial themes. Appearing within the theme of 'Person and Place', Peter Drew's portrait of *Monga Khan* is displayed next to Marshall Claxton's *An emigrant's thoughts of home*, 1859, creating an opportunity to consider the migrant experience and how this can shape both personal and national identity.

Peter Drew

Monga Khan 1916 2016;
2019 {printed}
from the Aussie series 2016
brush and ink on screenprint
114.5 x 80.5 cm (image)
117.5 x 83.5 cm (sheet)

National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne
Purchased, NGV Supporters
of Prints and Drawings, 2020
2020.185
© Peter Drew



VERNON AH KEE ***SELF-PORTRAIT (POSSESSES SOME OF THE ATTRIBUTES OF AN ARTIST) 2007***

Brisbane based artist Vernon Ah Kee is a member of the Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji and Gugu Yimithirr peoples. He is known for his text-based works, video and installation art as well as large-scale drawings like self-portrait (*possesses some of the attributes of an artist*), 2007. Ah Kee has used charcoal and paint on canvas to render his likeness. The details of the work are concentrated on Ah Kee's facial features, stern expression and intense gaze. The large scale of this work affords Ah Kee the ability to render the features realistically but in an expressive loose style.

STATEMENT ABOUT KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Ah Kee's *self-portrait (possesses some of the attributes of an artist)* is displayed prominently in the centre of a gallery wall approximately two and a half metres from the floor. The ceiling height of almost seven metres allows the work to be hung high creating a dynamic display. Ah Kee's self-portrait is surrounded by both two and three-dimensional portraits, all of which belong to the theme 'Meet the Artist'. The exhibition designer and conservator worked closely together to ensure Ah Kee's work featured prominently and yet beyond the range of touching distance. The artist's use of charcoal and delicately painted details make the portrait particularly fragile. In this instance the high ceiling of the gallery room offered an equally advantageous solution to the considerations of conservation and exhibition design. A scissor lift was used in order to safely position the work high on the wall.

Vernon Ah Kee

*self-portrait (possesses some of the
attributes of an artist) 2007*
charcoal and synthetic polymer paint
on canvas
240.1 x 179.3 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, Victorian Foundation for
Living Australian Artists, 2008 (2008.9)



PATRICIA PICCININI *NEST* (2006)

Patricia Piccinini's *Nest*, 2006, is a sculptural installation comprised of a pair of scooters whose forms and features have been modified to resemble those of a mammal. The pair have been shaped and positioned to look like a mother and young child. Their close connection evident in the way they look affectionately and intently into one another's eyes. As it explores ideas pertaining to motherhood, attachment and relationships, *Nest* is displayed under the theme of 'Intimacy and Alienation'.

STATEMENT ABOUT KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Nest is positioned in the centre of a circular-shaped plinth placed in an uninterrupted sightline. The custom-built plinth is 20cm tall and brings *Nest* to eye height. Its placement in the middle of the gallery space allows visitors to safely circumnavigate the plinth for a 360-degree view of the sculpture. As well as maximising visibility, the plinth also provides protection. Measuring 320cm in diameter, it creates ample physical distance between the artwork and the viewer without any need for a more obtrusive barrier or a case.

The artwork hanging on the wall directly behind *Nest* has been hung higher than the standard display height. This leaves part of the wall blank, and helps viewers see *Nest* clearly as they enter the space.

Reflecting the sentiments expressed in *Nest*, the artworks directly left to the sculpture relate to family, parenting and children. The placement of these artworks aims to reinforce the meanings and ideas embedded in the theme and establish a stronger relationship between *Nest* and the other artworks on display.

Patricia Piccinini

Nest (2006)

enamel paint on fibreglass, leather,
plastic, metal, rubber, mirror,
transparent synthetic polymer resin,
glass, ed. 2/3

(a-b) 104.2 x 197.0 x 186.4 cm
(variable) (installation)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, Victorian Foundation
for Living Australian Artists, 2006
(2006.415.a-b)

IN THE GALLERY

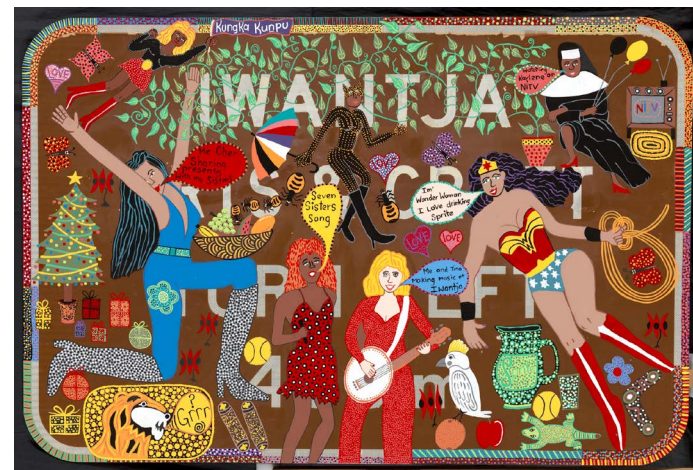


EXHIBITION PROMOTION

Several art works have been used as hero images to represent the exhibition in its promotion. This selection reflects the breadth and diversity of the exhibition and invites audiences to consider what constitutes a portrait. Kaylene Whiskey's joyous painting *Seven Sisters Song*, 2021, a new acquisition for the NGV, has been used as one of the hero images reinforcing this idea that a portrait does not need to be an exact representation.

The exhibition has been promoted via a media release which is sent to media outlets by the NGV Public Affairs and Media team, and online on NGV owned channels such as the NGV website, social media, eNews, What's On guides and NGV Magazine. It is also promoted in NGV International, NGV Australia and Fed Square through screens and signs.

Eight large flags advertising the exhibition were created to be flown on the Swanston Street edge of Fed Square. Featuring the exhibition title and several hero art works, this activity aimed to promote the show to a broad public audience nearby a heavily used tram and train stop.



Kaylene Whiskey
Seven Sisters Song (2021)
enamel paint on road sign
120.0 × 180.0 cm irreg.
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, Victorian Foundation
for Living Australian Artists, 2021



The exhibition is accompanied by a publication produced by the NGV and features written reflections by some of Australia's foremost writers, thinkers, artists and poets. Each author was invited to choose an artwork in the exhibition that resonated with their lived experience. This publication centres portraiture within contemporary conversations around identity, belonging and representation in Australia.



Left: A full-page magazine advertisement promoting the exhibition
Right: Flags along Swanston Street at Fed Square promoting *WHO ARE YOU: Australian Portraiture*

IN THE GALLERY

How does the exhibition design impact the audience's appreciation and understanding of the work/ theme of the exhibition?

How does it support the curator's vision?

EXHIBITION DESIGN

NGV curatorial staff, conservators and exhibition design met regularly with NPG staff via video call, phone calls and email to plan and prepare for the exhibition. During this time, they considered the layout and presentation of the artworks.

The overall design of the exhibition was informed by the idea 'Meet the Gaze'. The aim of the designers was to create a series of moments where the gaze or face of the artworks is encountered en masse or individually. The gaze itself creates an immediate and powerful connection with audiences, making the exhibition experience at times equally intimate and disconcerting.

The curatorial themes are also reflected in the exhibition's design. In 'Inner Worlds', for example, nine portrait busts gaze out towards the viewer. The display forms the shape of expanding wings, reinforcing the fantastical and surreal ideas explored in the curatorial theme.

Colour is an important feature of the exhibition and has been applied to the gallery walls to correspond with the idea of a portrait revealing what is ordinarily hidden. At the beginning of the exhibition the walls are painted a neutral colour grey (Dulux Dieskau). The colour grey was selected because it easily accommodates the varied styles and aesthetics of each of the artworks in the exhibition. The first gallery space features the singular colour grey which is then slowly pulled back as you progress through the exhibition until you finally arrive at the last room where the walls are painted a crisp white (Dulux Lexicon 1/4).



A view of the nine portrait busts on display in the exhibition

NOTES

1. National Gallery of Victoria, 'Peter Drew in Conversation' 2021, NGV, Victorian Government, <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/whats-on/programs-events/peter-drew-in-conversation/> accessed 11 February 2022
2. Sophie Gerhard, Joanna Gilmour, Penelope Grist, David Hurlston, Hannah Presley (eds), *WHO ARE YOU Australian Portraiture*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, and National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, 2022

FURTHER RESOURCES

[WHO ARE YOU: Australian Portraiture exhibition page](#)

[National Portrait Gallery website](#)

[VCE Studio Arts: Art Industry Contexts at NGV](#)

(Front)

Michael Riley

Maria 1986 (printed 2013)

from the series 'Michael Riley

Portraits 1984-1990'

inkjet print on paper (frame:

41.5 cm x 43.4 cm depth 5.0

cm, image: 39.1 cm x 40.9 cm)

SUPPORTERS



NGV SCHOOLS PROGRAM PARTNERS



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