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William Blake: Romantic Visionary

Mid-Century Mavericks: iconic design

Katsushika Ōi: Hokusai's Artist Daughter

Yayoi Kusama

Global Icon

NGV MAGAZINE

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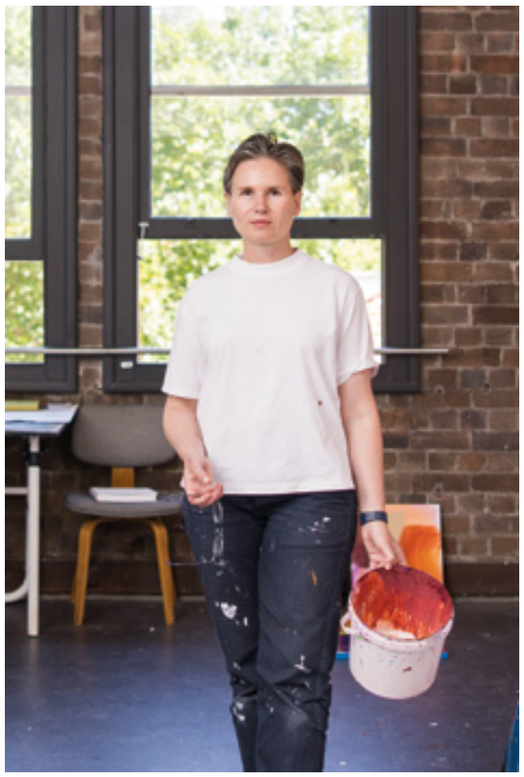
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Every effort has been made to obtain accurate information for this publication. The views expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect those of the NGV. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this publication may contain names of people who have passed away.

The National Gallery of Victoria acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-Wurrung peoples of the Kulin nation, the Traditional Owners of the land on which the NGV is built.

(cover) Yayoi Kusama © YAYOI KUSAMA

(p. 4, above) Installation view of **Yayoi Kusama**'s *Dancing Pumpkin* 2020. Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund, 2025 © YAYOI KUSAMA

(p. 4, below) **Bhupen Khakhar** *Terrace party* 1974. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Felton Bequest, 1979 © Bhupen Khakhar Estate

(p. 5) Gemma Smith in her Artspace Sydney studio 2024. Photo: Anna Kucera



From the NGV

This summer, visitors approaching the NGV will see the extraordinary creativity of Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, and her characteristic dots, across neon pink, white and black, wrapping the trees lining St Kilda Road and across the iconic Waterwall entrance to NGV International. Stepping inside, discover the artist's *Narcissus Garden,* 1966/2004, resting like a meadow of silver spheres, while walking around and under the towering *Dancing Pumpkin,* 2020, looming large in Federation Court.

Welcome to the vibrant and surprising world of *Yayoi Kusama*, the exciting NGV summer exhibition of almost 200 works. In this issue of *NGV Magazine* we continue coverage of *Yayoi Kusama* with an in-depth essay on the artist's recent decades and the moments that transformed her career on page 44. On page 50 we spotlight Kusama's 5-metre tall *Dancing Pumpkin*, which joins the NGV Collection through the extraordinary support of the Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund, and on page 48 we follow the artist's experiential infinity mirror rooms over the years, including her newest – *Infinity Mirrored Room—My Heart is Filled to the Brim with Sparkling Light*, 2024 – which makes its global debut in Melbourne. There is plenty to see and do this summer at *Yayoi Kusama*, including weekly late-night access to the exhibition at NGV Friday Nights.

An exhibition of this scale would not be possible without the trust and vision of many, and I thank Presenting Partner Visit Victoria, Principal Partner Mercedes-Benz Australia, Major Partners Telstra, Macquarie Group, Qantas and Schweppes, Timepiece Partner Rolex, and Learning Partner University of Melbourne. And it is through the support of the community that the NGV continues to raise funds towards the acquisition of Kusama's *Narcissus Garden*. We welcome donations of any size and are truly grateful for your support.

Japan has a long and rich tradition of artisanal skills and creativity, and we are also delighted to share the story of Katsushika Ōi – a once little-known artist and the daughter of great Edo printmaker Katsushika Hokusai. Discover Ōi's *The seeds of a guide to leaf tea* (*Senchi tebiki no tane*), 1848, a remarkable and rare work that is now part of the NGV Collection thanks to the support of Dr Pam Martin and Paul Martin on page 82.

At The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, don't miss *Bark Salon*, housed in the *Wurrdha Marra* gallery, which takes the traditional nineteenth-century European salon display style to new heights, with more than 150 bark paintings from the NGV Collection on show. Read more about the significance of the works on display on page 15. We celebrate more groundbreaking First Nations artists at NGV Australia in *Sally Gabori: Land of All*, a focussed collection display that charts the creative journey of the late artist Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori. Ahead of your visit, read about Gabori's immeasurable contribution to contemporary art with a feature story on page 80.

Wishing you a wonderful summer season, and we look forward to welcoming you to exciting exhibitions, displays and events across the coming months.

Tony Ellwood AM
Director

Welcoming in a new year, this issue of *NGV Magazine* brims with stories from the NGV and beyond. We begin with a tour of new works at NGV International, exploring a display of mid-century furniture from the likes of Ray and Charles Eames and Verner Panton on page 20, before examining the story behind an *Akari* floor light by Isamu Noguchi, which joins the collection thanks to NGV Supporters of Decorative Art.

Also on display, on page 88 we take a closer look at the life and work of Bhupen Khakhar, a self-trained Indian artist often called the country's first Pop artist. His work *Terrace party*, 1974, acquired by the Felton Bequest, returns to display on Level 3 and is described by NGV Senior Curator of International Art Dr Ted Gott as 'one of India's most modern and progressive artists'.

We also explore the first work by Richard Avedon to join the NGV Collection. Generously gifted by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family, *Renée, the New Look of Dior, Place de la Concorde, Paris, August 1947*, 1947, printed 1978, is a photograph that captures a sense of movement that became a hallmark of Avedon's style, as NGV Curator, Photography, Maggie Finch explains on page 72. The American photographer who worked for *Harper's Bazaar, Vogue* and *Elle* throughout the twenty-first century specialised in capturing movement in still pictures of fashion, theatre and dance.

And finally, at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, we welcome to the Collection a new work by Gemma Smith. *Bask*, 2024, exemplifies the complex colour-play for which the Sydney-based artist is best known. She sits down with Amita Kirpalani, NGV Curator, Contemporary Art, on page 60 to discuss this latest work, supported by the Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists.

I hope our readers, supporters and collaborators had a relaxing and enjoyable summer break, and we look forward to sharing more stories of art and design with you in 2025 through *NGV Magazine.*

Donna McColm
Managing Editor, *NGV Magazine*
Assistant Director, Curatorial and Audience Engagement



Featured Contributors

AKIRA TATEHATA
Kyoto, Japan

Akira Tatehata is an art critic and poet. Born in Kyoto, he graduated from Waseda University Faculty of Letters, Arts and Sciences. He has been on the editorial staff of the arts magazine *Geijutsu Shinchō* and a faculty member of Tama Art University, and has served as director of the National Museum of Art, Osaka and president of Kyoto City University of Arts. In 1993, as commissioner of the permanent Japanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale, Tatehata organised Yayoi Kusama's first solo exhibition at that venue. The author of several poetry collections, he won the Hagiwara Sakutarō Prize in 2013. Tatehata is currently Director of the Yayoi Kusama Museum, Tokyo.

LYNN ZELEVANSKY
New York City, United States

Lynn Zelevansky is an art historian, curator and writer. As Henry J. Heinz II Director, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (2009–17), she oversaw the 2013 Carnegie International and co-curated *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*, 2016, and *Paul Thek: Diver*, 2011. As Terri and Michael Smooke Curator and Department Head, Contemporary Art at LACMA (1995–2009), her many exhibitions included *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958–68*, 1998, and *Beyond Geometry: Experiments in Form, 1940s–70s*, 2004. As Curatorial Assistant, MoMA, New York (1986–95), she curated *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties*, 1994. She has published widely on modern and contemporary art.

GEMMA SMITH
Sydney, Australia

Gemma Smith is an Australian artist whose abstract paintings and sculptures explore the interaction between colour and surface, intention and chance. Since 2000, Smith's work has been featured in more than 100 exhibitions. In 2019 University of New South Wales Galleries held a major retrospective of her work titled *Rhythm Sequence*. Her early work was based on abstract paintings of crystalline forms exploring geometric and spatial possibilities in jewel-like colours. Recent paintings have departed from precise geometries and exact their complex colour-play from a combination of spontaneous painterly gesture and hard-edge colour-blocking that tangle and weave together to create intriguing spatial incongruities.

OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

Adele D'Souza
Amita Kirpalani
Cathy Leahy
Carla Dusevic
Coral Guan
Edwina Green
Elisa Scarton
Imogen Mallia-Valjan
Jessica McEwen
Kate Ryan
Maggie Finch
Meg Slater
Michael Gentle
Misha Agzarian
Monica Do
Myles Russell-Cook
Dr Ted Gott
Siân Scott-Clash
Suzi Shaw

Making News



NEW NGV PUBLICATIONS

YAYOI KUSAMA
Sián Scott-Clash

To accompany the major summer exhibition, the NGV has published *Yayoi Kusama* ($59.95) and, for kids (including big kids!), *Lots of dots* ($24.95). Charting eighty years of Kusama with newly commissioned essays from four esteemed Kusama experts, texts from NGV curators, over 200 artwork images and images from Kusama's archives, *Yayoi Kusama* is the definitive title on the life and work of an iconic artist.

Produced in the shape of one of Kusama's famous pumpkins, *Lots of dots* introduces young readers to the artist's work through a celebration of Kusama's ubiquitous polka-dot motif and its many colours and patterns. Both are available at the NGV design store or at bookshops nationally.

Purchase these and more books from the NGV design store or online at ngv.melbourne.store

UPCOMING EVENTS AT NGV

Make the NGV your home for art, festivals, performance and incredible experiences this summer.

SUMMER SPECIAL EVENTS
Monica Do

In collaboration with Asia TOPA, Australia's major triennial of Asia-Pacific performance, the NGV presents a new site-specific work by choreographer and performer Melanie Lane titled *Pulau (Island)*, performed beneath Yayoi Kusama's *Dots Obsession,* 1996/2024, in the NGV's Great Hall over two evenings.

To experience *Yayoi Kusama* after dark, book your ticket to NGV Friday Nights for unlimited late-night access to the exhibition as well as DJs, pop-up bars and a food inspired by the exhibition and Kusama's homeland, Japan.

Midsumma x NGV returns in January and February this year at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia at Federation Square. The program features Queer exhibition tours led by NGV curators, special guests and events just for teens.

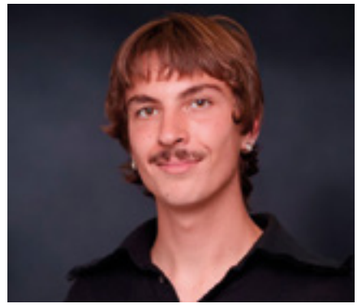
To learn more, see the full NGV summer program and book tickets to NGV Friday Nights, visit ngv.melbourne/whats-on

NGV KIDS SUMMER FESTIVAL
Kate Ryan

NGV Kids Summer Festival is back this summer with a week of free hands-on activities, interactive exhibitions, stories and performances especially for children and families.

NGV Kids Festival runs from 11–17 January at NGV International and The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia.

The NGV warmly thanks Supporter City of Melbourne for its support. Visit ngv.melbourne/kids-summer-festival for more information.



NGV CURATOR AWARDED RHODES AUSTRALIA AT-LARGE SCHOLARSHIP 2025

NGV Curator, First Nations Art and University of Melbourne Bachelor of Arts student, Michael Gentle has won a 2025 Rhodes Scholarship Australia-at-Large to study at Oxford University. The prestigious scholarship was announced by the Chair of the Selection Committee, Justice Michelle Gordon AC, High Court of Australia, at an event at Australian National University, Canberra. At Oxford, Gentle intends to study a Master of Studies in History of Art and Visual Culture and a Master of Studies in World Literatures in English.

(left) *Lots of dots* by Yayoi Kusama. Published by National Gallery of Victoria, 2024

(above) Michael Gentle

(p. 11, left) **Ettore Sottsass** *Carlton room divider* 1981. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with the assistance of the National Gallery Women's Association, 1985 © erede Ettore Sottsass / Copyright Agency, 2024



NGV COLLECTION ON TOUR

VICTORIAN ROUNDUP
Carla Dusevic

On display until 23 March, Heide Museum of Modern Art presents *Molto Bello: Icons of Modern Italian Design*, showcasing the design achievements of twentieth-century innovators and featuring a number of works from the NGV Collection by designers including Ettore Sottsass and Gio Ponti.

Find out more at heide.com.au

Opening 4 March at the Museum of Australian Photography in Melbourne, *The basement: photography from Prahran College 1968–81* will display the *Alphabet* folio series by Carol Jerrems, on loan from the NGV, in its totality.

Visit maph.org.au for information.

INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS
Carla Dusevic

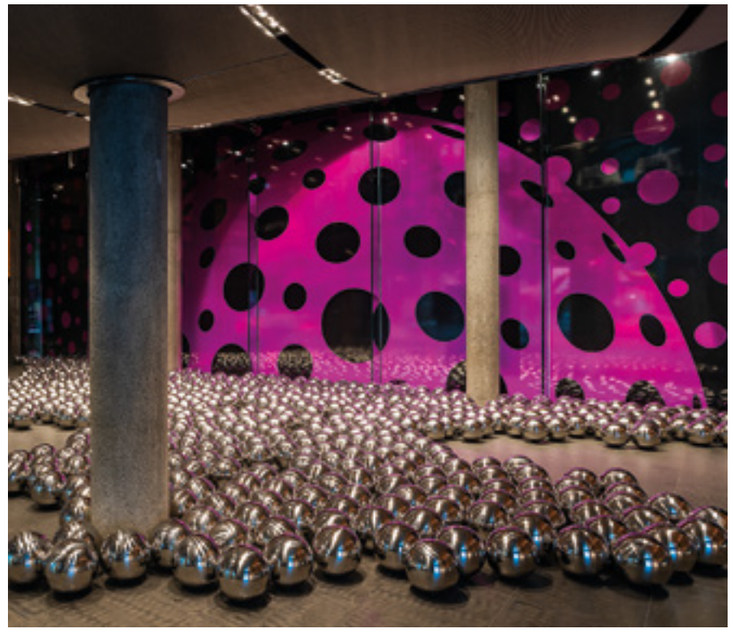
Visitors to National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea can look forward to encountering Australian-born artist Ron Mueck's monumental installation, *Mass* 2017, on display from 11 April.

Originally commissioned for the 2017 *NGV Triennial*, this momentous work comprises 100 large-scale resin sculptures of the human skull, inviting contemplation about life, death, humanity, biology and the human and skeletal form in art history.

NGV ANNUAL APPEAL
Misha Agzarian

There are few artists working today who can match the presence and impact of global phenomenon Yayoi Kusama. *Narcissus Garden* is an iconic work that embodies Kusama's playful and poignant spirit. The work is as important for audiences today as it was when first conceived by the artist almost sixty years ago and famously staged without permission at the 1966 Venice Biennale. Presented as a part of the *Yayoi Kusama* exhibition, *Narcissus Garden* greets every visitor to the NGV this summer. With your support, *Narcissus Garden* will join the NGV Collection for many generations to enjoy. To join us in making this important acquisition possible, we warmly invite you to support the NGV Annual Appeal, and thank all those who have made a contribution to date, including leadership gifts from the Decjuba Foundation, Shirley Hsieh and Susan Lin, Paula Fox AO & the Fox Family, The Neilson Foundation, Gwenneth Nancy Head Foundation, Tim Fairfax AC & Gina Fairfax AC, John Higgins AO & Jodie Maunder, King Family Foundation, The Neumann Auster Family, Chris Thomas AM & Cheryl Thomas and 2024 Annual Dinner donors. We are sincerely grateful for donations of any size, and thank you for your generosity.

Donate online today at ngv.melbourne/appeal



(right) **Yayoi Kusama's** *Narcissus Garden*, 1966/2024, and *Untitled*, 2024 on display at the NGV International, Melbourne for the National Gallery of Victoria's *Yayoi Kusama* exhibition until 21 April 2025. © YAYOI KUSAMA. Photo: Tobias Titz

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BARK SALON

Bark Salon, newly on display in *Wurrdha Marra*, showcases the extraordinary NGV Collection of First Nations bark paintings and features works spanning more than eighty years.

Words by **Michael Gentle** *and* **Myles Russell-Cook**

(p. 14 and pp. 16–17) Installation views of *Bark Salon* in *Wurrdha Marra* at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia. Photo: Sean Fennessy

In the art world, a 'salon' typically refers to a formal display of various artists's works. The term originated in 1667 when the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris held its first public exhibition. The most famous of these exhibitions, the Paris Salon, became a highly anticipated event in the Western art world throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, held either annually or biennially. Today, the salon format is iconic – a maximalist exhibition style that enables audiences to observe aesthetic trends, thematic linkages and sociopolitical contexts while simultaneously presenting a visual spectacle. In the words of the seventeenth-century French writer and historian Jean Rou in 1857:

> Words could not express what an agreeable spectacle this was for me to see all at one time such a prodigious quantity of every kind of work in all the diverse aspects of painting, I mean history, portrait, landscape, seascape, flowers, fruits; and by what sort of magic, as if I had been transported to foreign climes and to the remotest centuries...

Since its opening in 1861, the NGV has presented various salon hangs. The most current and prominent iteration of the iconic salon format, the European Salon, has been on display since 2010 on Level 2 of NGV International.



‘Bark painting is a distinctive Indigenous Australian art form, particularly associated with northern Australia. For millennia, First Peoples across the continent have used bark to depict cultural narratives through figurative, semi-abstract and abstract designs’
Michael Gentle

With its deep-red walls and high ceilings, the salon displays a vast collection of nineteenth-century European paintings and sculptures. This space not only showcases the Western art-historical canon, but also reimagines it as a site of visual spectacle. The NGV Salon, as it stands today, also recalls the style of hang in the 1860s when the NGV was housed with Victoria’s Museum and State Library.

Over time, the NGV’s European Salon has hosted many interventions and innovations. In 2006 the NGV introduced four additional corner walls, making the salon fully immersive. In 2009 the original blue walls were replaced with red, the traditional colour of the Paris salons. In 2012 Australian works were added, referencing the presence of Australian artists in nineteenth-century London and Paris, and to demonstrate the continuity between art movements in Europe and Australia.

In 2020, during the second NGV Triennial exhibition, the NGV Salon became home to *Salon et Lumière*, an immersive experience that used modern projection techniques, 3D mapping and a four-channel soundscape to re-create the excitement of the nineteenth-century salons. This cutting-edge light show transported audiences back in time, offering a thrillingly modern take on the traditional format.

Bark Salon builds on and challenges this history by addressing the absence of non-European art in such historical displays. Composed entirely of First Nations Australian bark paintings from the NGV Collection, *Bark Salon* is the first major salon at the Gallery dedicated exclusively to First Nations artists.

Bark painting is a distinctive Indigenous Australian art form, particularly associated with northern Australia. For millennia, First Peoples across the continent have used bark to depict cultural narratives through figurative, semi-abstract and abstract designs. While bark painting for ‘exhibition’ purposes began in the 1930s, the tradition of First Peoples using bark in art dates back far earlier. With natural ochres and earth pigments, artists convey important stories through visual symbols that connect them to their ancestors.

Today, single-panel bark paintings dominate the genre, but bark painting has evolved over time – shaped by the art market and the bold aesthetic experimentation of the artists themselves. *Bark Salon* presents the work of artists from across northern Australia who use bark painting to preserve, maintain and celebrate a connection to Country; the long history of passing down cultural and ancestral knowledge.

For First Nations people, Country is not just land; it is a living entity that embodies knowledge, history, legends and futures. Country encompasses waterways, plants, animals and the cosmos, all connected through art, story, music, dance and daily life. Bark paintings are themselves ‘Country’ and for many artists the collecting of materials from Country is an integral part of their creative process.

The salon display in *Bark Salon* is an apt way to showcase the breadth and diversity of this rich cultural tradition. It not only allows for a large display of works at once, but also references this aesthetic style that – while associated with European art – is not unique to Europe. Before the adoption of single-sheet bark painting, First Nations artists would paint cave walls, shelters and objects using ochre pigments. This maximal aesthetic can be seen in shelters like one from 1987 by Bardayal Nadjamerrek and Dick Ngulayngulay Murrumurru that shows the dramatic impact of this style long before European salons emerged.

Shelters like this, used during the wet season in Arnhem Land, were adorned with figurative and totemic designs of great cultural significance. *Bark Salon* both references the European salon history and places the ancient practice of painting on bark shelters in the same context, with works tracing the evolution of bark painting from traditional methods to modern experiments in the medium.

During the wet season, it is typically men who gather bark for painting. They search the land for suitable trees and cut rectangular shapes into the outer bark using hand axes. Working in groups, they carefully peel off single sheets of bark, sometimes climbing high into trees or standing on vehicles to do so. These bark sheets are then taken back to the community, where the rough outer bark is stripped away, and the thinner inner bark is flattened with stones and scorched with fire. The result is an organic and living canvas that can be used both to connect to and depict Country.

Bark Salon illustrates the connections between international and local art histories, offering audiences a chance to see the significant experimentation that has occurred within the bark painting tradition. The exhibition includes works like David Namirlmirl Mangiru’s *Traditional hunting*, 1952, which depicts a hunting scene with a fresh-water crocodile, kangaroo and black bream, alongside fibre objects like dilly-bags and fish nets. This work, acquired in 1952 and presented by the Department of the Interior, highlights the NGV’s early history of collecting First Nations art and the evolution of the Gallery’s approach to Indigenous Australian works.

At the time of its acquisition, *Traditional hunting* was only the third Indigenous work in the NGV Collection, following two watercolours by Aranda artist Edwin Pareroultja. Displayed in *Bark Salon*, Mangiru’s work is part of a continuum of figurative practice that situates bark painting within the broader art-historical legacy of Indigenous Australian art.

The exhibition also includes works by prolific artists such as Birrikitji Gumana, whose *Fish Trap at Gängan*, 1952, (also presented by the Department of the Interior) depicts an intricate design that blends agricultural and fibre practices with figurative elements. Gumana’s work honours Yolŋu people’s connection to Country and, like many bark paintings in *Bark Salon*, it speaks to both cultural resilience and artistic innovation.

In recent years, art centres have supported the flourishing of bark painting in Top End communities, with the NGV having particularly strong holdings from north-east Arnhem Land. Artists such as Noŋgirrŋa Marawili, a prolific painter, have expanded the genre, experimenting with new materials like synthetic pigments and introducing bold colour palettes. Marawili’s work, alongside many others in *Bark Salon*, exemplifies the dynamic ways bark painting has evolved while maintaining its cultural significance.

Bark Salon traces the history of this medium, celebrating its unique connection to the Australian landscape while creating space for contemporary innovations. Much like European salons from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, *Bark Salon* invites audiences to consider political change, shifting cultural relations and the ongoing evolution of Indigenous Australian art. The exhibition mirrors Australia’s changing treatment of First Nations art and artists, offering a powerful witness to trauma, tradition and the trailblazers who have redefined the medium.

Michael Gentle is NGV Curator, First Nations Art. Myles Russell-Cook is ACCA Artistic Director and CEO and former NGV Senior Curator, Australian and First Nations Art.

See *Bark Salon* at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia.
For more information about this free exhibition, scan the code.



Mid-Century Mavericks

On Level 3, NGV International you can catch a glimpse of some of the mid-century furniture from the NGV Collection in a new display celebrating art and design from the 1950s through to the 1990s.

Words by **Elisa Scarton**

Mid-century Modern is the 1984 title of art historian Cara Greenberg's influential book on the design movement. The phrase is to-the-point and no-nonsense; a succinct alliteration that evokes the clean sculptural lines and balanced aesthetic of a style that began in the 1940s.

American design duo Charles and Ray Eames described mid-century furniture as: 'Getting the most of the best to the greatest number of people for the least amount of money.' [1] The partners in life and work championed democratic design rooted in notions of functionality, elegance and simplicity. Mid-century furniture was a straightforward and affordable alternative that could be mass-produced thanks to innovations in materials, manufacturing processes and transportation.

It was also fun. The bubble-like shapes, neat proportions and alluring sugar-coated colours of works like Eero Aarnio's *Ball chair* or George Nelson's *Marshmallow sofa* earned mid-century design the nickname 'furniture candy'.[2] And while first-generation mid-century furniture, if purchased today, may no longer fit the Eameses' description of accessible or affordable, it remains one of design's most recognisable and iconic movements.











On Level 3 of NGV International you can catch a glimpse of some of the mid-century furniture from the NGV Collection in a new display celebrating art and design from the 1950s through to the 1990s.

The aforementioned Eameses are well represented. Their *Storage unit, model ESU-400* (purchased NGV Foundation with the assistance of NGV Supporters of Decorative Arts) sits at the centre of the display. Designed in 1949–50 and manufactured in 1952–55 by Michigan manufacturer Herman Miller, it is a veneered plywood and zinc-plated steel storage system of interchangeable parts that came in a range of sizes and colours.

It was initially promoted as an economical solution to the changing storage needs of American families after the Second World War, but its interchangeable parts also appealed to owners' creative spirits, transforming a piece of furniture into a Tinkertoy for adults with endless configurations in bright primary colours.

Further along the NGV display you can find *Lounge chair 670* and *Ottoman 671*, designed by the Eameses in 1956 and manufactured again by Herman Miller in 1972. The design duo based these works on the traditional English buttoned leather club chair. With the streamlined elegance of moulded plywood with rosewood veneer and soft padded leather, the lounge chair has become a mainstay of architectural magazines and executive offices. It corresponds to the rise of open-plan living spaces in the 1950s, when designers were bringing furniture away from walls.

Across the ocean in Denmark, mid-century furniture adopted the Functionalist trend of abandoning ornamentation while still maintaining the warmth and beauty inherent in traditional Danish craftsmanship. The scarcity of materials after WWII encouraged the use of plywood and, later, plastic. Verner Panton's *Panton chair*, designed in 1960 and manufactured in 1971, was the first single-form, materially unified chair design to be produced in plastic. The bright cherry version on display was a hallmark of the Danish designer and architect, who was known for his masterful use of colour and encapsulated the spirit of mid-century modernism, being light, strong, comfortable, easy to store, affordable and suitable for mass-production.

Fellow Danish designer and architect Arne Jacobsen is also represented in the new NGV display with his iconic *Swan chair*, designed in 1958 and manufactured c. 1968. Like the Eames duo, Jacobsen spent the 1950s experimenting with new materials and technologies, seeking to design seating that embraced the sitter in a more rounded sculptural form.

In 1958 Jacobsen began one of his most famous architectural commissions, the SAS Royal Hotel in Copenhagen, for which he designed all the interior furnishings and fittings, including the *Swan chair*. The design contains no straight lines, making it look organic and soft despite its simplicity.

Poul Henningsen's *Artichoke, pendant lamp* was also designed in 1958 for another Copenhagen establishment, the Langelinie Pavilion – a modernist all-glass, cube-shaped restaurant that still stands today. Henningsen's *Artichoke, pendant lamp* (purchased with funds donated by Peter and Ivanka Canet) graced the restaurant's interiors alongside his *Flowerpot pendants* and Jacobsen and Flemming Lassen's *Mayor sofas*, making it a Mecca of Danish modernism at the time. Henningsen himself was an architect, artist, designer and critic, and his *Artichoke, pendant lamp* featured seventy-two copper leaves to totally conceal the lightbulb and diffuse a warm luminescence that, thanks to the pale-pink paint applied to the underside of the leaves, gave diners below a healthy, rosy glow.

But it wasn't just the Danish and Americans who embraced mid-century furniture. In 1968 the Italian design trio Piero Gatti, Cesare Paolini and Franco Teodoro began working on a seating concept that was practical, casual and stylish, and would speak to the young, hip generation of *boemi* (bohemians). Their solution *Beanbag (Sacco)* became a cult object overnight. Inspired by piles of snow or volumes of water that could take on new forms through pressure, the chair was affordable, versatile and fun. The work on display (purchased by NGV Foundation) is mustard yellow and is placed alongside French designer Robert Mathieu's *Pendant light*, c. 1954 (purchased NGV Supporters of Contemporary Design and Architecture, NGV Supporters of Decorative Arts and NGV Foundation Patrons). Mathieu founded his own company at 98 Boulevard Charonne, Paris, which would remain his flagship store throughout his life. The black rods of *Pendant light* support multiple lampshades in red, yellow and dark green, favouring functionality over form, or as Mathieu put it, 'rational lighting'.[3]

When Greenberg published *Mid-Century Modern: Furniture of the 1950s*, she constrained mid-century modern to the years between 1933 and 1965, but there is no consensus on the movement's exact end dates. In the 1990s Herman Miller and its manufacturing competitor Knoll began reissuing mid-century pieces that had been out of production, usually with a few updates and a stamp to distinguish the new versions from the earlier models. This stoked a love affair with mid-century furniture that continues to this day.

Elisa Scarton is NGV Senior Editorial Coordinator.

To see these mid-century works and more, visit Level 3, NGV International.
The NGV warmly thanks all those who supported the works discussed.

(p. 20) **Robert Mathieu** (designer) **R. Mathieu Luminaires Rationnels, Paris** (manufacturer) *Pendant light* c.1954. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.Purchased, NGV Supporters of Contemporary Design and Architecture, NGV Supporters of Decorative Arts, NGV Foundation Patrons, 2019 © Robert Mathieu

(p. 21) **Charles Eames** (designer) **Ray Eames** (designer) **Herman Miller, Michigan** (manufacturer) *Storage unit, model ESU–400* designed 1949–50, manufactured 1952–55. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased NGV Foundation with the assistance of NGV Supporters of Decorative Arts, 2022

(p. 22–23)Installation view, NGV International collection display. Photo: Selina Ou

(p. 25) Installation view of **Isamu Noguchi's** *Akari, floor light, model BB3-33S* c. 1952 in the Japanese galleries, NGV International. Photo: Selina Ou



ANATOMY OF AKARI

'Everything is sculpture,' Isamu Noguchi once said, 'Any material, any idea without hindrance born into space, I consider sculpture.' This is an apt description for the designer's iconic *Akari* lights, six of which are held in the NGV Collection.

Words by **Suzi Shaw**

Sculptor and designer Isamu Noguchi grew up in Japan but became firmly embedded in American life after he was sent to school there in 1918 at the age of fourteen. As an adult, his interest in the traditional crafts of his father's homeland grew from the 1950s onwards.

Noguchi is well known for his stone sculptures; however his most widely acknowledged work also included furniture designs, many of which are now design classics. From 1951 until his death, he created an extensive range of designs known as *Akari* (meaning 'light', with associations of illumination and weightlessness). Noguchi described these works as being like the beauty of fallen leaves and cherry blossom: *Akari* are 'poetic, ephemeral, and tentative'.[1]

Noguchi's table, floor and pendant *Akari* lamps vary in the shape of the lantern and the material and design of the stand or stem. The 'BB' models, pictured above, have bamboo stems. All were designed to provide a soft, almost shadowless light with similarities to the *chochin* (lantern) tradition, creating a mood rather than a task light. This may have provided a counter to the industrial and modernised world buzzing around Noguchi. As he once explained, 'The harshness of electricity is thus transformed through the magic of paper back to the light of our origin – the sun – so that it's warmth may continue to fill our rooms at night'.[2]

‘Noguchi described these works as being like the beauty of fallen leaves and cherry blossom: *Akari* are ‘poetic, ephemeral, and tentative’

Suzi Shaw

Noguchi produced more than a hundred *Akari* light sculptures, their design informed by numerous Japanese traditional materials and crafts one might otherwise overlook due to their ubiquitous domestic use – such as woven bamboo shallow baskets used in the kitchen, or bentwood *bento* boxes. The lights were made by craftspeople with specialised skills in paper making, bamboo processing, silk thread production, wood bending, lacquering and metal casting.

Akari, floor light, model BB3-33S, designed in 1952, was recently acquired for the NGV Collection through NGV Supporters of Decorative Arts. It was made by Ozeki & Co., a family-run Japanese company Noguchi initially chose to manufacture his designs, helping to revive several then flagging craft industries. The light had a cast-iron ‘pebble’ base, a variation from the designer’s pendant, or hanging lanterns, made from the mid 1960s up to today. The pebble incorporates the wiring of the lamp and the welded-on receiving plate for the bamboo stem. ‘Made in Japan’ is cast into the bottom rim, differentiating it from the Vitra company’s manufacture of the same model.

Cast-iron products have been made in Japan for centuries, mostly domestic items such as kettles. They are often finished with a patination technique whereby *urushi* lacquer is brushed on and scorched. *Urushi* is the sap of the Chinese lacquer tree (*Toxicodendron vernicifluum*), which is grown and processed in Japan for various decorative and adhesive uses. Once this application hardened it was followed by a brushed-on solution of iron filings and tea to provide the final, soft black patination. While we can’t be sure this patination has been applied to these commercially made lamps, the similarities in finish are visible.

The bamboo stem of the *BB3-33S* model was constructed with similar materials and techniques to those used for *wazao* (traditional Japanese fishing rods). Made of two pieces of bamboo, the stem has an upper piece with a narrower diameter trimmed to ensure it fits snugly into the lower, larger piece. Bamboo used for *wazao* (and *Akari* lights) must be harvested, trimmed and then heated to straighten it. The heat also shifts the oils from the interior culm to the surface where they can either be polished off or kept. These bamboo lengths are then left to dry for one or several years before they can be further refined for use. Once properly dried, the bamboo is straightened again by heating it over a charcoal fire, then the interior is hollowed out using a long drill on a lathe. This enables the electrical wiring to pass up through the stem to the lamp holder above.

The black band in the middle of the stem is a feature borrowed from the design language of *wazao*, where a silk thread is wrapped around the larger-diameter lower piece to tighten the split lower bamboo rod around the smaller upper one, then lacquered with black-pigmented *urushi* to harden it.

At the top of the lamp, a three-ply circle has been constructed into which the two ‘horns’ of the lamp shade were inserted using a technique known as *magemono* (bentwood work), where the wood is soaked for around twenty-four hours then clamped around a wooden form and allowed to dry. A rice starch and/or *urushi*-based adhesive is used to glue the ends together. The outer surface of this circular component has been coated with a refined clear *urushi* called *suki urushi*, possibly with a tint in it such as gamboge, a transparent, yellow-coloured plant resin.

The two ‘horns’ are constructed around a segmented wooden mould of their final shape, onto which the bamboo ribbing is wrapped into cut-outs in the mount segments. As the bamboo ribbing swirls upwards, new lengths of ribbing are joined end-to-end by wrapping the two ends together with silk thread, or in some cases by wrapping with paper. Handmade mulberry-bark paper, also known as *washi*, is cut into rough strips then applied over the ribbing, which has been brushed with starch paste adhesive. The strips are then trimmed in place with a razor before the next strip is applied. Finally, the segmented wooden mould is broken down within the paper lantern and removed out of the widest end. In the *BB3-33S* model, the lampshade components are kept in their stretched position by the insertion of metal wires that apply an appropriate tension to the irregularly shaped form. Once the wiring and globe holder is installed, each ‘horn’ is then slotted into the sides of the central ring ready for activating with the flick of a switch.

The skills, materials and tools required to create *Akari* light sculptures are becoming scarcer, so designs such as Noguchi’s, which utilise so many traditional crafts, support and promote their continuation by future generations.

Suzi Shaw is NGV Conservator, Frames and Furniture.

See Isamu Noguchi’s *Akari, floor light, model BB3-33S*, designed c. 1952 in the Japanese galleries, NGV International. The NGV would like to warmly thank NGV Supporters of Decorative Arts for acquiring the work for the Collection.

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ACADEMY TRAVEL

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Chicago-born Joan Mitchell was one of the most important members of the postwar Abstract Expressionist movement. Her work graced major museum walls and garnered critical and public acclaim throughout her lifetime – a true accolade in an era when female artists rarely achieved widespread fame. This year marks the 100th anniversary of Mitchell's birth, and her work *Marge* (a gift of Loti Smorgon AO), 1990, returns to display at NGV International on occasion of her centennial anniversary.

Words by **Jessica McEwen**

> 'Music, poems, landscape, and dogs make me want to paint... And painting is what allows me to survive.'
> – Joan Mitchell, 1975

In 1974 the American artist Joan Mitchell said, 'Music, poems, landscape, and dogs make me want to paint... And painting is what allows me to survive.'[1] It is Mitchell's rich body of work that now survives as a testament to her bold, abstract artistic practice. Born in Chicago in 1925, Mitchell had an exceptional career that spanned more than four decades, marking her as one of the most significant artists of the postwar era. Uninterested in pure replication, her emotionally charged compositions evoke people, poetry and places. Mitchell's gestural brushwork was animated by the landscapes she carried with her, continuously seeking to bring colour to the margins of memory.





On display at NGV International, Mitchell's 1990 work *Marge*, French for 'margin' or 'fringe', is an aptly titled reminder of the abstracted margins of Mitchell's practice. Dashes of yellow paint cross the canvas of *Marge*, mixing with blue into green and then lilac. The strokes on each separate panel are distinct, yet the colours are mirrored. The punctuations of dark red in the upper section of each canvas draw the eye across from left to right, further entangling the boundaries of this divided work. *Marge,* gifted to the NGV by Loti Smorgon AO in 2011, exemplifies Mitchell's interest in abstraction that both constrains and expands – or, as art critic Barbara Rose claimed, Mitchell's 'struggle between coherence and wild rebellion'.[2] Within *Marge,* the brushstrokes seem to shift, colour and abstraction spilling over and beyond the titular margins.

Growing up with a mother who was a poet and an editor, poetry was central to Mitchell's early years. It was not unusual for guests such as Robert Frost and Carl Sandburg to frequent the dinner table of her childhood. She would later say, 'My paintings repeat a feeling about Lake Michigan, or water, or fields ... It's more like a poem ... and that's what I want to paint.'[3] While Mitchell showed an early talent for verse, her father insisted that she choose between poetry and visual art. Her subsequent painting studies began at the age of eleven and she later attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she studied anatomy and figuration. After moving to New York, a travel fellowship took her to France in 1948, during which her interest in abstraction burgeoned. When painting *Figure and the city*, 1950 (Joan Mitchell Foundation, New York), Mitchell later stated, 'I knew that it would be my last figure.'[4]

In late 1949 Mitchell returned to the United States from France and became absorbed into an active and intensely competitive community of painters and poets. She joined the regular gatherings at Cedar Tavern, a locale that many historians consider to be the incubator of Abstract Expressionism and from where

Jackson Pollock and Jack Kerouac were eventually banned. While Mitchell's name is often referenced in the context of Abstract Expressionism, she has said, 'Abstract is not a style. I simply want to make a surface work.'[5] Her practice developed with rhythmic counterposed lines, layered fields of colour, and brushstrokes that precariously balanced order and chaos. Of her evolving style in the 1950s, Mitchell stated, 'That particular thing I want can't be verbalized … I'm trying for something more specific than movies of my everyday life: To define a feeling.'[6]

Mitchell was one of only eleven women included in Abstract Expressionism's first formal presentation of seventy-four artists in New York in 1951. Yet Mitchell widely rejected the 'all over' approach to composition that was prevalent among male contemporaries and others. Instead she shaped her compositions through strong, gestural brushstrokes that generated a sense of energy focalised within the centre of the painting. Mitchell looked to nature and people to inspire her choice of colour and form, titling her works after their completion. Of her uncanny ability to embed paintings with mood, Brice Marden wrote, ' She could make yellow heavy.'[7] The sunflower-yellow paint of *Marge* draws the eyes of the viewer down the canvas, brightening the palette while adding weight to a landscape or moment we cannot name.

In 1955 Mitchell began to divide her time between New York and France, her life traversing geographic margins. Between 1960 and 1964, by then permanently based in Paris, Mitchell underwent an emotional and artistic upheaval. The death of her father and her mother's subsequent cancer diagnosis led her to turn away from the bright colour palette of the 1950s. Mitchell defined the works of this period as 'very violent and angry paintings',[8] with vigorous brushwork often condensed into central masses across multiple panels.

Following the death of her mother in 1966, Mitchell moved to Vétheuil, a small town north-west of Paris and only a few kilometres from Monet's historic home and garden in Giverny. Mitchell's painting practice evolved with the new landscape that surrounded her, becoming less linear and preferencing blocks of vivid colour. While working within similar landscapes to the Impressionists who frequented the region before her, Mitchell worked neither *en plein air* or from preparatory sketches or photographs. It was within the margins of her memory that the abstracted and emotional landscapes of Vétheuil emerged onto her canvas.



Portrait of painter Joan Mitchell (1925–92), in her Paris studio, September 1956. Photo: Loomis Dean / The LIFE Picture Collection / Shutterstock

In 1982 Mitchell was the first woman to have a solo exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Yet her rising commercial success also marked the beginning of a decade-long struggle with health. Mitchell's work from 1985 onwards evidences her physical and psychological struggles. The scale of her work adjusted to her diminishing physical capacity, and she turned to the more manageable medium of watercolours. *Marge*, painted within the final two years of Mitchell's life, is a distillation of her decades of painting. After being diagnosis with cancer in 1984, Mitchell died in Paris in October 1992.

Within the confines of canvas and oils, *Marge* is one remnant of Joan Mitchell's extraordinary practice. The paint drips, splatters and scrapes across the surface as if frozen in motion. The tangles of colour and abstraction are a palimpsest of memory and experience. Mitchell's oeuvre survives her as a singular approach to abstraction and reinterpretation of figure, colour and landscape. Mitchell claimed: 'I could certainly never mirror nature. I would like more to paint what it leaves me with.'[9]

Within the NGV Collection we are left with *Marge.*

Jessica McEwen is NGV Project Officer, Exhibitions Management and Design.

See Joan Mitchell's *Marge*, 1990, on Level 3, NGV International. The NGV acknowledges the late Loti Smorgon AO and the Smorgon family for gifting this work to the NGV Collection.

(pp. 28–29) **Joan Mitchell** *Marge* 1990. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Gift of Loti Smorgon AO through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2011 © Estate of Joan Mitchell

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KUSAMA



KUSAMA, THE OUTSIDER

Developed by the NGV in collaboration with the artist, the exhibition *Yayoi Kusama* includes many works never before seen in Australia. In this edited extract from the exhibition publication, author Akira Tatehata explores Kusama's return to her homeland in the 1970s, where she continued to paint but also wrote surreal poetry and fiction.

Words by **Akira Tatehata**

In 1973, Yayoi Kusama moved from the United States back to Japan. But her reception was far from that of a champion's homecoming. The happenings she created in late 1960s New York – anti–Vietnam War protests featuring naked young men and women, or the intrusion into the Sculpture Garden at the Museum of Modern Art – were reported in Japan by tabloid magazines as scandal-seeking, rather than as the work of a brave anti-establishment, avant-garde artist.

After her return to Japan, Kusama continued to make what came to be called 'soft sculpture', which she had begun in New York. In this work, some familiar items – such as sofas, suitcases, women's robes, dressing tables and rowboats – were covered entirely with phallus-shaped, cotton-stuffed fabric forms. The works Kusama had made in New York exude strong sexual obsession, and while the later pieces are equally imbued with the obsessiveness of repetition, they also appear somewhat humorous. While most of the works are painted silver, one soft sculpture of a boat is in shocking pink (*Pink Boat*, 1992, Nagoya City Art Museum) and another, of a dining table and chairs, is covered in brightly coloured polka-dotted fabric forms (*Farewell Supper*, 1981, Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art). The display could be recognised as a forerunner of Neo Pop.

A striking characteristic of Kusama's work in the 1980s was the variety of colours and shapes she introduced to her soft sculpture. She would pile up boxes stuffed with cushion-like forms, or create free-standing shapes reminiscent of strange tropical plants, all charged with a mysterious life force.

These works characterise what we can call Kusama's unique biomorphism. Biomorphism can be seen in Joan Miró's abstract Surrealism or Jean Arp's sculpture, but whereas their works invoke

‘Kusama cultivated ‘new spheres of self’ that she could not access by visual or plastic means by creating a literary heroine in New York, who represents Kusama herself’
Akira Tatehata

‘Returning to Japan, I met up again with my native language. By writing novels and poems in Japanese, I was able to shine light on a different facet of my life, one that I could not reach with plastic arts’
Yayoi Kusama

some kinds of beasts, Kusama’s from the 1980s are intensely floral. The same characteristic can be observed in other works from this period, not solely her soft sculpture. Kusama’s unique biomorphism may be traced to memories of her family’s seedling business in the Shinshu mountains.

In terms of two-dimensional work, following the series of mysterious collages produced immediately after her return to Japan in the 1970s, Kusama began painting large canvases totally filled with dots, lines, nets or circles, just as she had been in New York. This method would continue until the 1990s, but her Japan paintings of the late 1970s and 1980s are slightly different from the earlier ones. Both feature repetitions of patterns, but whereas in the earlier works the nets or dots subtly quiver with thick paint, in the later ones the brushwork is neater and clearer, and the paint is smooth. Furthermore, while the pattern is all over the canvas, they are animated with various connotations – from the vastness of the universe or animistic consciousness down to the minute world of swimming sperms or slithering snakes. Pumpkins, Kusama’s most symbolic motif, also appeared in the early 1980s. Her clear, graphic art-like depiction resulted in many charming images.

Another significant activity on Kusama’s return to Japan was her prolific writing. In 1978 she published the autobiographical novel *Manhattan Suicide Addict*. The rich vocabulary flowing through its pages vividly describes the chaotic world of avant-garde art during the golden age of Greenwich Village, and Kusama’s outstanding intelligence, insight and expression surprised many who had considered her (even if positively) as a peculiar outsider.

In 1983, she won the Literary Award for New Writers from the magazine *Yasei Jidai*, and over the following decade published fourteen novels and one collection of poems, one after another. Many of the novels are wild fantasies, unbound by literary conventions, based on her experiences in New York. On her motivation to start writing novels, Kusama says:

> Returning to Japan, I met up again with my native language. By writing novels and poems in Japanese, I was able to shine light on a differ-ent facet of my life, one that I could not reach with plastic arts. This allowed me to cultivate new spheres of self and reorient my soul.
>
> ... the extraordinary tenacity of human beings, the way of human life, the presentiment of approaching death, the existence of love, the brilliant coruscations of light and the dark scars of our lives, to say nothing of the incomprehensible form of the cosmos and the overwhelming mysteries of space, time, distance. What is it that towers in the background, looming over all this? I wanted to express my powerful yearning for that unknown something and to create a sublation of spirit with my rediscovered first language.[1]

Kusama cultivated ‘new spheres of self’ that she could not access by visual or plastic means by creating a literary heroine in New York, who represents Kusama herself. This is Yanni, the main character in *The Hustler’s Grotto of Christopher Street* (1983), described by Kusama as an ‘Oriental girl’. Yanni lives on Christopher Street and manages a clandestine gay club to supply male prostitutes to customers. Henry, a Black man with whom Yanni is friendly, needs money for drugs and asks her for help, and she introduces him to a client named Greenberg. Greenberg takes Henry to his country house, where they have sex. Hallucinating under the influence of drugs, Henry kills Greenberg by cutting off his penis. Learning of the incident, Yanni takes Henry to the rooftop of the Empire State Building. Suddenly, Henry disappears. As Yanni looks down from the balcony, she sees a black dot falling into the milky fog. The dot gets smaller and smaller and is completely absorbed in the fog.

In this story, the social minorities of Yanni the Oriental girl and Henry the Black man are juxtaposed with Greenberg, a wealthy white man, and the hustler’s grotto in Christopher Street is juxtaposed with the Empire State Building, the stronghold of capitalism. Here, Kusama is both Yanni and Henry. Kusama, who has suffered from phallophobia, subjugated the phallus by means of endlessly proliferating it in her work, while Henry (Kusama), a straight man, disables it by cutting it off. The last scene of Henry, as a tiny dot, being swallowed into the infinity of the mist cannot but recall Kusama’s terms for her art, such as ‘self-obliteration’ or ‘particle-like obliteration’. Kusama’s novels resonate with her painting and sculpture at the deepest level: they flesh it out. That is why the otherwise detestable story of penis-cutting becomes mythological pornography. (In *The Hustler’s Grotto*, the client’s namesake is the influential art critic Clement Greenberg, who promoted Abstract Expressionism at the time. Kusama borrowed the name as a towering phallic symbol.)

When I was appointed commissioner for the Japanese pavilion at the 1993 Venice Biennale, I proposed a solo exhibition of Kusama. I considered the Venice Biennale the ideal opportunity for a re-evaluation of Kusama. It had been nearly twenty years since her return to Japan, and she had received two retrospective exhibitions at museums there.[2] But still, she was generally considered an outsider artist. My intention was to dispel this deeply ingrained view and place her correctly as a major artist who shaped mainstream postwar art. That was why I borrowed some of her 1960s New York net paintings and soft sculptures for the Venice presentation.[3]

To clarify myself here, I am not denying that Kusama is, in some ways, an outsider artist. But works of a pure outsider do not belong to the dialectical force of history; an outsider’s art of 100 years ago and that of today are equally extraordinary. In contrast, Kusama, like Vincent van Gogh, who was also an outsider in a way, embodies the dialectic of art history. She appeared at the right time at the right place, and played an active role as Abstract Expressionism gave way to Pop Art and Minimal Art.

Some suggested that I should have focused on presenting Kusama’s pop and kitsch art at Venice. I saw the point of this argument; her recent and latest pop and kitsch works were very attractive and linked to her pioneering Neo Pop work in the 1980s. However, I believed that to present Kusama properly, and not just as an ‘interesting’ artist, was to show that she was a great artist both inside and outside Japan. If the success of the Venice Biennale in fact led to her 1998 retrospective exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which then travelled to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, resulting in her achieving international recognition, and now to this show in Melbourne a quarter of a century later, I can say that my intention at the time has been fulfilled.

Akira Tatehata is an art critic and poet based in Kyoto, Japan.

Yayoi Kusama is on display at NGV International until 21 April.

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This is an edited extract of an essay from the NGV publication *Yayoi Kusama*. The book features over two hundred images alongside four newly commissioned essays by esteemed Kusama experts. Available for purchase online and at NGV International design store. Scan the code to purchase.

(pp. 34–35) **Yayoi Kusama** *Flower Obsession* 2017. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased, NGV Women’s Association, 2018. © YAYOI KUSAMA. Photo: Eugene Hyland

(p. 36) **Yayoi Kusama** *Pollen* 1986. Ota Fine Arts



KUSAMA, THE FASHION DESIGNER

Yayoi Kusama has always had an interest in self-presentation. As Lynn Zelevansky writes, Kusama's photographic archive shows how much she has enjoyed finding a personal 'look' to suit each body of work. Even today, Kusama still displays her keen and unique fashion sense.

Words by **Lynn Zelevansky**

In a photograph of Yayoi Kusama taken within *Dark Obsession – Night Tokyo,* 2008, she wears a patterned dress composed of black on yellow snake-like forms, some very large and others smaller, which appear to crawl all over her body, almost overwhelming her. The snakeskin imagery is made with her signature dots, but these are not joyful dots. The colours of the installation work in which she stands are the reverse of her dress; black with yellow dots of different sizes cover its undulating surfaces. Darkness pervades the image. Kusama wears her orange wig, the one colour that deviates from the environment. Her face, the image's palest element, and her wig, draw our attention. She stares out at us, her hands hanging by her side. She seems lost.

Like many that Kusama has directed, the photograph is a work unto itself, combining fine art, performance art and fashion, a combination that is a signature element in her work. Writing of her years in New York, 1958 to 1973, she makes this clear: 'I continued to change and develop in major ways. I was becoming an artist not just limited to fine art, but one who was able to express herself in a wider spectrum of activities. It all came together with the Happenings.'[1] There's irony in the fact that the happenings gave birth to this important approach, since they were arguably her most notorious works. She developed them with a rotating band of 'hippies'. This was the 1960s, the anti–Vietnam War movement was in full swing with young people involved in activism and experimental lifestyles and sexual activities. Kusama, who strongly opposed the war, took a slogan of the time, Make Love Not War, literally. Her performances involved nudity and sometimes public sex acts. Her role in them was as a kind wizard, directing the action and often covering the naked bodies of the performers in polka dots.

Reporters and television personalities covered her activities extensively, to the degree that Kusama's parents in Japan, who came from wealthy, conservative families, got wind of what she was doing and withdrew the occasional financial support that they gave her, making her life more difficult.[2] At that point, she was already making clothing.

Her sewing ability, which may have originated in childhood or adolescence, is evident from the sculptures that she created earlier in the sixties. They involved cast-off pieces of household furniture, household implements and old clothes, all of them covered in stuffed phallic protrusions. In one case, she used hundreds of cotton gloves to make an enormous red flower.

‘Kusama was not only interested in fashion, she was also profoundly aware of the power of clothes’
Lynn Zelevansky

Kusama’s interest in fashion was evident back in Japan, when, in 1952, she designed a sweater for herself that was clearly on trend for the time. She brought that sensibility to New York with her, and it can be seen in the stylish yellow outfit, probably homemade, that she wears in a photograph standing in front of one of her large white net paintings at a 1961 exhibition at the Stephen Radich Gallery.

Kusama was not only interested in fashion, she was also profoundly aware of the power of clothes. In New York, she usually dressed in old, paint-spattered clothes, like any artist, but for special openings and events she wore a kimono, and she did the same in Europe. She understood that the kimono infused her presence with a whiff of the exotic. Wearing it, she was manipulating both cultural and sexual stereotypes to her advantage, and it worked. In short order, she came to know most of the important figures in the New York art world of the time, often men. There is a photograph from the early 1960s of Kusama in a kimono standing next to Barnett Newman, one of America’s most celebrated artists.

In the late 1960s, perhaps responding to her parents’ withdrawal of funds, Kusama opened a business, The Kusama Fashion Company, which produced clothing and textiles. She writes that her designs were sold in shops around the country, and that Bloomingdale’s, a large New York department store, set up a ‘Kusama Corner’.[3] She reports that a party dress that accommodated up to twenty-five people sold for US$2000, a lot of money at the time; her robe for gay men, which had a hole strategically placed in the rear, cost US$15, and her evening gowns, with openings at the breasts and rear, went for up to US$1200.[4] Kusama’s success with these items had to be a measure of the time. In 1964 in Los Angeles, designer Rudi Gernreich created a topless bathing suit. With its minimalist chic style – black with a high-waisted bottom and straps that went over the shoulders and between the breasts – it had the spirit of the first half of the sixties. Kusama’s clothing was more explicitly sexual with its peep holes that exposed body parts, adding to the allure of illicit sexual experimentation that characterised the late 1960s and early 1970s. She also produced mini dresses painted with the infinity net pattern that she had developed on her canvases. With bell sleeves that fit tightly on the upper arm and then flared to large proportions, they were stylish and more wearable. In 1969, she opened her own boutique on Sixth Avenue and 8th Street in New York.[5]

While she was making clothes and running her boutique, Kusama was also developing businesses that would produce, film and distribute her happenings. As important as they were for her, however, Kusama’s happenings had exposed her to trials, time in jail and pursuit by the FBI (probably as a result of her well-publicised anti-war activities). Under these pressures, her physical and mental health began to deteriorate. She returned to Tokyo and eventually decided to stay. She found the psychiatric hospital where she resides today and slowly healed, writing novels and making art. She had her first retrospective at the Kitakyushu Municipal Museum in Japan in 1987, and in 1993 she represented Japan at the Venice Biennale. By the end of that decade, she was on the brink of becoming an international art star; doors opened to her. In 1999, she collaborated with the famed fashion designer Issey Miyake, creating textiles covered in her day-glo polka dots. As part of the collaboration, there was also a performance at the Fondation Cartier in Paris in 2000 that focused on the Miyake and Kusama collection. During this time, she also designed furniture and clothing in association with Studio Graf in Osaka.

In 2012 the first collaboration was launched between Kusama and Louis Vuitton, founder of the eponymous and prestigious fashion house. Together, they produced a collection of luxury items. On Fifth Avenue in New York there was a Louis Vuitton store window with a wax model of Kusama wearing a red dress with large white dots, surrounded by red-and-white sculptures and wallpaper.[6]

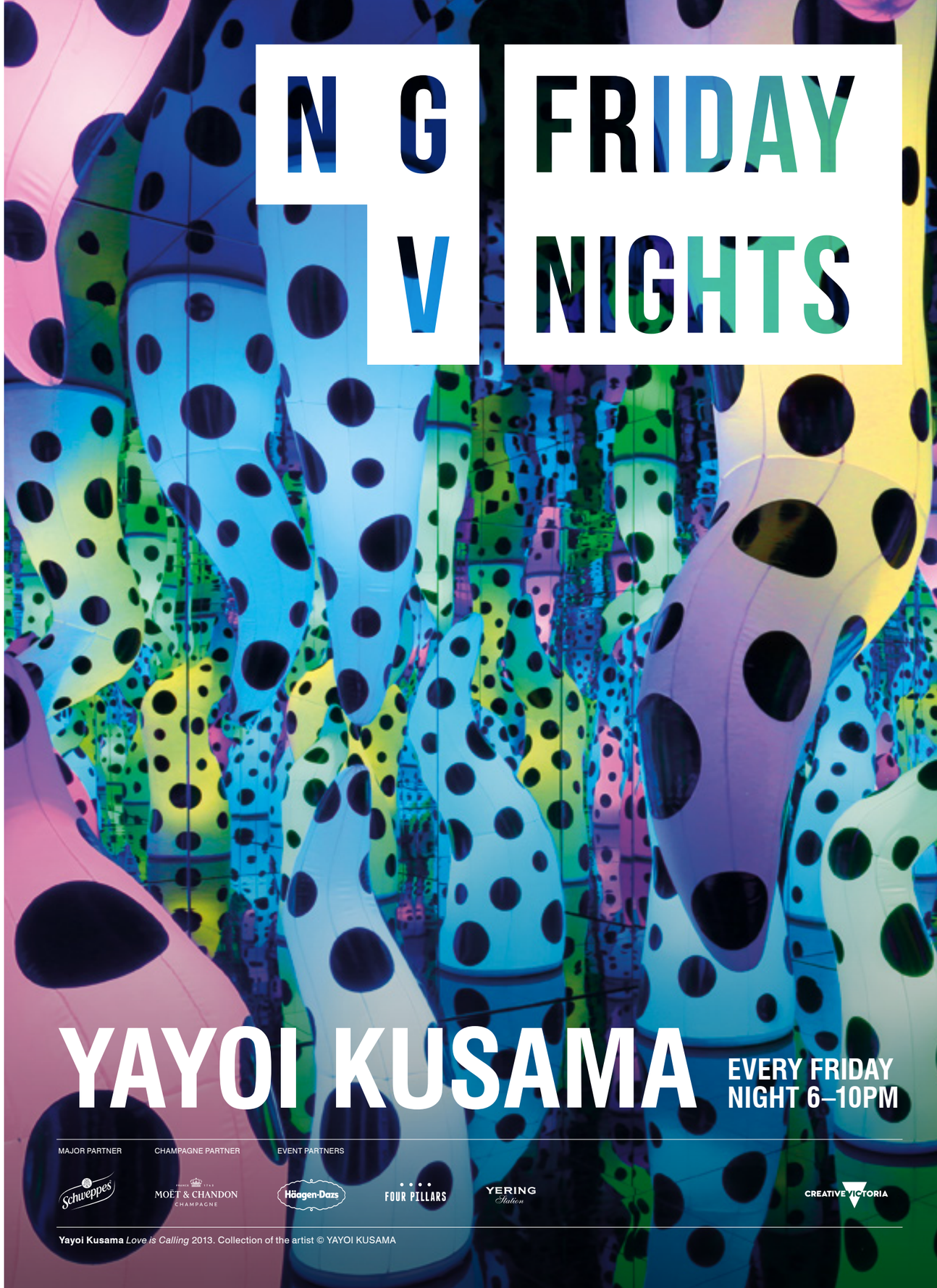
For their 2022–23 collaboration, Kusama’s New York avatar was an extremely lifelike robot. Its arm moved as it appeared to paint dots on the window with great concentration. The figure moved in a believable way and looked more like the artist than the 2012 wax model did. It focused on painting with an intensity reminiscent of the artist herself. For a moment, it would look out at the people watching (the window drew many observers and was covered extensively in the media) but without really caring that they were there. This time, Vuitton gave Kusama free reign over the brand’s products, including bags, women’s and men’s fashion, shoes, sunglasses, jewellery and fragrances. One outfit included a bucket hat in white with black dots, a black trench coat with a matching bag, each covered in blue, red, yellow and green dots, and black ankle boots with dots on its thick high heels.

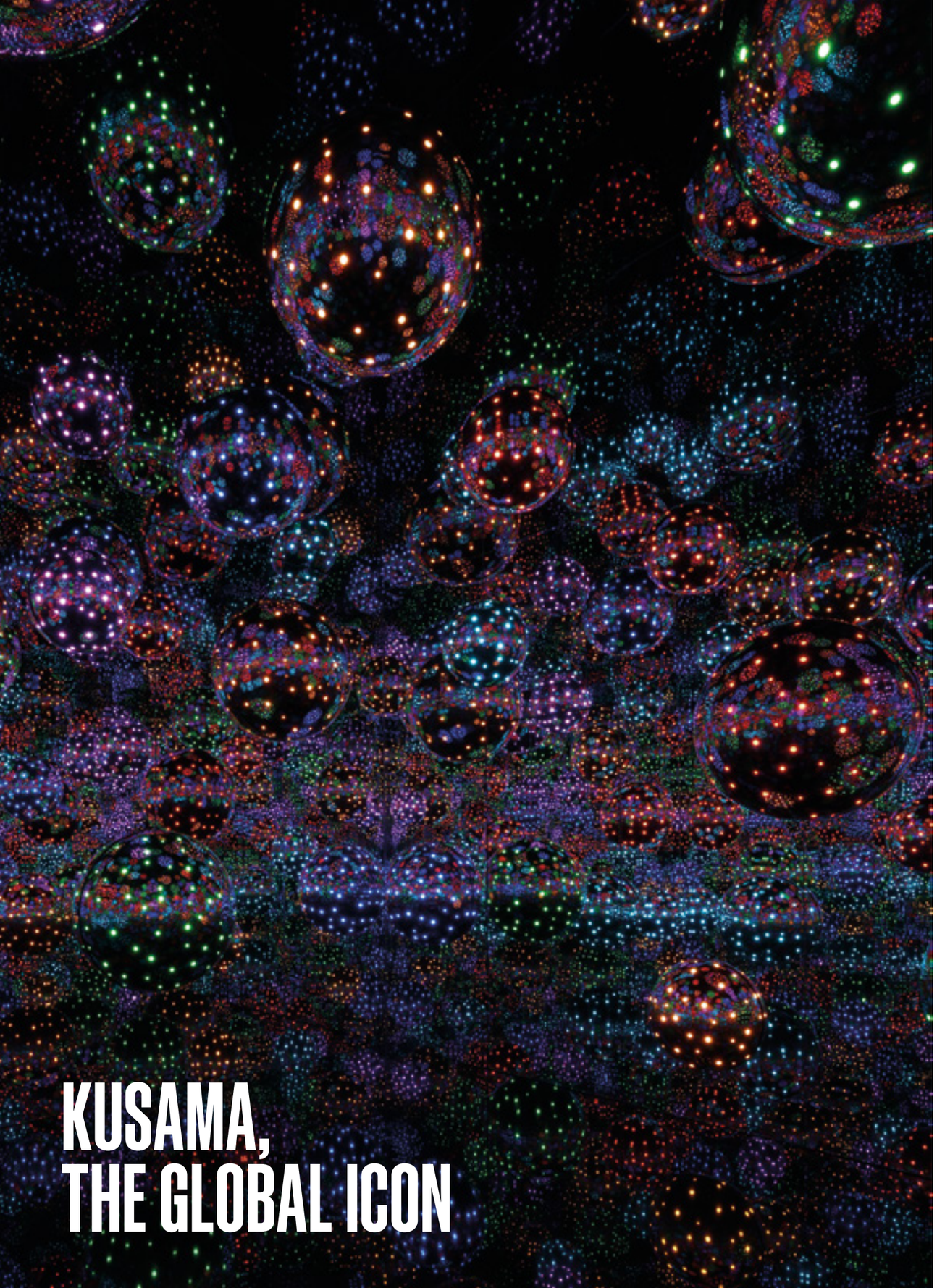
Like *Dark Obsession – Night Tokyo,* Kusama’s work with Vuitton includes fine art (promotional photos show models in front of her paintings), performance (her avatar) and fashion. She no longer needs the kimono; she controls her world without it. According to *Elle* magazine, she is ‘the empress of Infinity art’.[7]

Lynn Zelevansky is an American art curator and historian.

See these works as part of *Yayoi Kusama* at NGV International until 21 April.

(p. 40) **Yayoi Kusama** *Avantgarde Fashion N* 1968/1998. Iwami Art Museum © YAYOI KUSAMA





KUSAMA, THE GLOBAL ICON

For close to nine decades, Yayoi Kusama has worked tirelessly to record her artistic vision across diverse media and cultural contexts. In recent decades, Kusama has emerged as an art icon, cultivating connections with her ever-growing twenty-first century audience, most notably through her consistent production of art that is deeply personal.

Words by **Meg Slater**

Yayoi Kusama is one of the world's most recognised artists. In 2016 she was the only artist named in *Time* magazine's list of The 100 Most Influential People.[1] In 2003 she was the top selling contemporary artist in auctions globally.[2] Her meteoric rise in recent decades has been amplified in the age of social media. Images of the artist's infinity mirror rooms and collaborations with luxury brands like Louis Vuitton have introduced an audience of many millions to her art. Beyond broader social and technological advancements, the mass appeal of Kusama's work can largely be attributed to its accessibility. Despite her larger-than-life status, Kusama has remained committed to making art that is deeply personal,. Across nearly nine decades of artmaking, she has never aligned herself with an art movement or group. Instead she has forged a path and sent a message that is singular yet widely understood. In her paintings, sculptures, drawings, poetry and installations, she grapples with subjects to which we can all relate – life, death, joy, loss, wonderment, and the complexity of the universe and our place within it.

A RETURN TO INFINITY

Before diving into Kusama's ever-expanding influence in the twenty-first century, it is important to acknowledge a pivotal moment in her career that saw her ascend from relative obscurity to global acclaim. In 1993 Kusama was the first solo contemporary artist to represent Japan at the Venice Biennale. For some, this selection was a surprising one, given the precarious position she occupied within Japan's art scene.[3] Following her experimental works of the late 1960s in New York, Kusama did not receive a hero's welcome when she returned to Japan in 1973. Her socially and politically charged 'happenings' and her alignment with the broader sexual liberation movement were branded 'provocative' in Japanese tabloids, and her legitimacy as an artist was called into question. Paired with several significant losses in Kusama's personal life and her poor mental and physical health, this rejection led to a period of isolation and introspection for the artist. It was close to a decade before she began to exhibit her work throughout Japan, and in 1989 she had her first retrospective at the Center for International Contemporary Arts in New York.

Curator Akira Tatehata, who selected Kusama to represent Japan at the Venice Biennale, saw the exhibition as an 'ideal opportunity for a re-evaluation' of the artist on a global stage.[5] The presentation included *Infinity Net* paintings from the late 1950s, *Accumulation* sculptures from the 1960s, *Stamens Sorrow,* 1985, and other botanical box-based works from the 1980s, and multi-panel paintings from the 1990s. It also marked Kusama's revival of the 'peep-in' mirror room format. *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)*, 1991, invited visitors to step into a yellow space that had been obliterated by black polka dots. At the centre of this installation was a mirror-clad cube with a small, square aperture on one of its sides. Through this opening, visitors peered into a sea of pumpkins (handmade by the artist and endlessly replicated in mirrored reflections). Curator Susumu Yamamoto has described Kusama's participation in the biennale as a 'kind of resurrection'.[6] It brought her from margins to the centre of contemporary art practice in Japan and beyond.

In the years immediately following the biennale, Kusama continued to experiment with and extend her immersive installations. In 1996 she debuted her first walk-through room. Filled with yellow and black polka-dotted walls and biomorphic balloons, *Dots Obsession* invited visitors to move through and interact with the room's otherworldly contents (rather than viewing from afar or through a peephole). Four years on, she crafted *Invisible Life,* a maze-like environment with the walls and ceiling covered in convex mirrors. From 2000, she began to develop new *Infinity Mirror Rooms* – a format she had not revisited since 1965. *Fireflies on the Water,* 2000, and *Soul Under the Moon,* 2002, each immersed visitors in a darkened, mirror-clad room, where they were reflected amid a galaxy of 'stars' (created with suspended lights in the former and suspended painted ping-pong balls and ultraviolet light in the latter).

Over the past two decades, Kusama has revisited and elaborated on these mirrored environments. She has also increasingly shifted towards creating dark, celestial spaces like *Chandelier of Grief*, 2016. At the centre of a mirrored hexagonal room, a single baroque-style chandelier is suspended inside a glass prism. The chandelier rotates slowly, its flickering light is reflecting in every direction, creating the illusion of endless chandeliers. *Love is Calling*, 2013, a darkened and mirrored space filled with illuminated and colourful tentacular forms, is narrated by Kusama reading one of her poems – 'Residing in a Castle of Shed Tears'. Written in 2010, the poem poignantly expresses Kusama's desire to spread a universal message of love.

As new iterations of Kusama's mirror rooms have emerged, their popularity has increased. In 2017 the Broad Museum hosted *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors*, and in the space of an hour sold 50,000 tickets.[7] Public enthusiasm for these works is unprecedented, which is quite remarkable given early presentations of these works in the 1990s attracted very few visitors. Glenn Scott Wright, director of Victoria Miro Gallery, has reflected on the exponential rise in popularity associated with Kusama's mirrored rooms: 'We had an Infinity Mirror Room at the first Victoria Miro show at Cork Street [in 1998] and practically no one came. The last show we had 80,000 visitors.'[8]

While the Instagramability of the sleek interiors of these rooms is partly responsible for this shift in demand, so too are the works' underlying principles, which have universal appeal. In each space, everyday materials like mirrors, lights and balloons are paired with repetitive forms and colours. The result is complete immersion within a new and seemingly endless world. Beyond spatial manipulation, each environment is linked to Kusama's personal experiences. According to curator Reuben Keehan, Kusama's use of mirrors and repetitive forms is 'an approximation of the hallucinations she suffered as a child, where her entire surroundings were covered with undulating patterns'.[9] In this way, Kusama is inviting us to experience her vision of the world, and to consider our place within it.

BEYOND THE GALLERY WALLS

As her *Infinity Mirror Rooms* demonstrate, Kusama tends towards materials and formats that allow her to achieve expansive outcomes. For much of her early career, her working environment and finances limited the materials she could use and the scale at which she could produce art. Despite these limitations, Kusama remained a firm believer in the inseparability of art and everyday life. This is clearly demonstrated in her performance-based practice of the late 1960s. Between 1967 and 1969, Kusama presented roughly seventy-five 'happenings' in prominent public settings, mostly in New York City. While these events were linked to the broader countercultural movements of the period, including sexual liberation and anti–Vietnam War protests, they also allowed Kusama to reach a wider audience. In a press release for one of her 1968 happenings in the New York subway, she makes this intention clear: 'Why remain strangers? Let's get to know one another!'[10]

The success and widespread recognition that Kusama achieved following her inclusion in the 1993 Venice Biennale allowed her to once again set her sights beyond gallery walls and into the world around her, this time through the creation of monumental public sculptures. Kusama completed her first public pumpkin sculptures in 1994. Presented on the grounds of the Fukuoka Art Museum and Naoshima Island, these works saw the artist's yellow polka-dotted gourds realised at a then unprecedented scale. In 2002, to coincide with her major retrospective exhibition and the inauguration of Matsumoto City Museum of Art, three flower sculptures (together known as *The Visionary Flowers*) were permanently installed in the Museum entrance. Using bright colours, polka dots and twisting forms, Kusama re-imagined the flowers she had encountered as a child as fantastical forms from a parallel universe.

Around the same time, Kusama began to produce large-scale figurative sculptures. In 2004 she created elaborate tableaus like *Hi Konnichiwa (Hello!)*, in which several young girls (*Yayoi-chan, Chii-chan, Miiko-chan, Nao-chan* and *Taa-chan)* are accompanied by dogs and a flower called *Hanako*. These gigantic sculptures, which saw the artist explicitly represent herself in her sculpture for the first time, were debuted in *Kusamatrix,* a 2004 exhibition at Mori Art Museum that welcomed more than 500,000 visitors in just three months.[11]

In the years since these initial presentations of Kusama's contemporary, large-scale sculptures in Japan, pumpkins, flowers and a range of other forms unique to the artist's visual language have been installed in public settings across the globe. For each sculpture, Kusama carefully considers both its intended location and the ways in which she can extend her explorations of a particular form. One such work is *Dancing Pumpkin,* 2020, Kusama's largest and most ambitious imagining of her beloved pumpkin to date, generously supported by the Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund. Whereas her earlier pumpkin sculptures have static, solid bases, *Dancing Pumpkin* has eleven tentacle-like legs. All but three hover above the ground, suggesting joyous movement and allowing visitors to weave through directly to interact with the monumental gourd.

Kusama's sculptural practice over the past three decades has played a formative role in cementing her status as a key figure in popular culture. Beyond the recognition of certain motifs as being a part of her visual language, audiences globally have become familiar with the artist herself and her striking visual appearance, recorded and re-imagined in her inflated avatars. Most recently, a towering *Yayoi-chan,* 2012/2023 (accompanied by her dog, *Toko-ton,* 2013) stood at the centre of a presentation of Kusama's immersive rooms as part of the 2023 Manchester International Festival. While she could not physically be present at the exhibition, Kusama was able to introduce herself to her audience of thousands.

EXTENDING THE BOUNDS OF ART

Kusama's self-imaging is not limited to her sculptural work. This leads into the final channel through which Kusama's likeness has been cemented within popular culture: her collaborations with world-renowned brands. In the early 2000s Kusama began to partner with a range of corporations, including Issey Miyake (2000), Coke (2001) and BMW Mini (2004). Her most notable collaboration thus far has been with Louis Vuitton. Kusama's relationship with the luxury fashion brand began in 2012, when she launched her first *Louis Vuitton x Yayoi Kusama* collection, consisting of bags, clothing and other apparel covered in her signature pumpkins and polka dots. The campaign for this collaboration was extensive and, importantly, heavily featured avatars of the artist. Louis Vuitton storefronts in New York and London featured an army of Kusama mannequins wearing red-and-white polka-dotted dresses and cropped red wigs. For her most recent collaboration with the brand in 2023, stationary mannequins became moving, lifelike copies of the artist holding paintbrushes and 'painting' the shopfront windows.

Some art historians and critics have questioned the artistic merit of this branch of Kusama's operations. However, if you look closely, you will find it is very much in line with her broader artistic practice. From her earliest *Infinity Net* paintings to her most recent *Infinity Mirror Rooms,* Kusama has documented herself alongside (and arguably, as a part of) her artworks. Further, her commercial ventures have been recognised by various curators and academics as a legitimate part of her artistic output. Curator Marie Laurberg included examples of the merchandise from the artist's 2012 collection with Louis Vuitton in the 2015 exhibition *In Infinity* at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen. According to Laurberg:

> Kusama refers to her Louis Vuitton 'exhibition' when she's talking about it, and it's very close to her gallery installation. She's offered a platform and she puts something in it. It's a shop window, but it's public art.[12]

More recently, curator Lynn Zelevansky reflected on the necessity for Kusama – now ninety-five years old – to find new ways to connect with her vast audience:

> It seems to me that if age limits you, and you are unable to travel the way you used to, a robot is an excellent surrogate. I have been thinking about, writing about and looking at Kusama's work for close to three decades, and am continually impressed by her ability to use new modes of expression. For me, the robot is an exemplary instance of this artist's creativity.[13]

Despite Kusama's larger-than-life public profile, she maintains a daily painting practice, which is, by nature, solitary. Since 2004 Kusama has spent each day filling hundreds of canvases with wondrous imagery inspired by childhood memories and emotions. Her most recent series of paintings, *Every Day I Pray for Love*, 2021–, is the third undertaken by Kusama in the twenty-first century. As in the major painting series before it (*Love Forever*, 2004–07, and *My Eternal Soul*, 2009–21), Kusama works intuitively to cover the surface of each canvas with repetitive patterns of nets, polka dots and other signature motifs. In a publication that pairs recent paintings with selected poetry written by Kusama since the late 1970s, a short poem by the artist serves as the book's introduction:

> My entire life has been painted here.
> Every day, any day.
> I will never cease dedicating my whole life
> to my love for the universe.
> Oh my dearest art.
> With the challenge of creating new art, I work as if dying;
> These works are my everything.[14]

These sentences, both optimistic and existential, demonstrate the consistency of Kusama's artistic vision, which remains, at its core, deeply personal.

Meg Slater is NGV Curator, International Exhibition Projects.

See these works as part of *Yayoi Kusama* at NGV International until 21 April.

(p. 44) **Yayoi Kusama** *Infinity Mirrored Room—My Heart is Filled to the Brim with Sparkling Light* 2024. Collection of the artist © YAYOI KUSAMA

(pp. 48–49) Installation view of *Chandelier of Grief*, 2016/18, Tate Modern, London © YAYOI KUSAMA

Don’t miss
DANCING PUMPKIN

Dancing Pumpkin, 2020, is one of Yayoi Kusama’s largest and most ambitious imaginings of the pumpkin to date. Towering at close to five metres tall, it is one of many free artworks on display at NGV International in celebration of the exhibition *Yayoi Kusama*. The sculpture joins the NGV Collection through the generous support of the Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund.

Words by **Coral Guan**

On a blustery spring day in October, a mysterious hoarding appeared in the central atrium of the NGV. Ascending the gallery escalators, people peered curiously over the rails onto the scene before them. A handful of oddly shaped packages lay around the perimeter of the installation zone. They were long, bulbous and tightly wrapped in white. Over the course of a day, the first package was hoisted upright and secured to the ground with the help of a crane. Slowly over the week, the other packages rose to join it, forming the legs of an enormous splayed structure. The white wrapping of each leg gradually peeled away, revealing glimpses of yellow and black. The form of the structure emerged one morning when its hooked top appeared above the hoarding. It was the unmistakeable stem of a giant pumpkin. Finally, the hoarding disappeared. With sunlight glinting on its glossy surface, *Dancing Pumpkin*, 2020, waited patiently for the first explorer to wander beneath its unfurled legs.

Newly acquired for the NGV Collection with the support of the Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund, this bronze sculpture is one of Yayoi Kusama’s most ambitious tributes to her beloved gourd, and its unveiling coincides with the NGV’s major retrospective exhibition dedicated to the artist. The work is close to five metres tall, painted yellow with black polka dots along the eleven tentacular legs extending from the pumpkin’s centre. While three of those legs are firmly planted on the ground, the rest are suspended mid-air – allowing people to venture beneath them. Kusama’s pumpkins are easy to anthropomorphise. The artist herself has described *kabocha* (the Japanese variety of pumpkin) with human qualities, noting their ‘generous unpretentiousness’ and ‘solid spiritual balance’.[1] Having first encountered pumpkins as a child on her family’s seed farm, the young Kusama found them so winsome that they became a subject in her student paintings of the 1940s. Over two decades later, they resurfaced as a favourite motif when the artist returned to Japan from the United States.

The pumpkin is widely perceived as symbolic of Kusama’s artistic rebirth of the 1980s. Yellow-and-black polka-dotted pumpkins featured in *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)*, 1991, which was the centrepiece of the artist’s landmark presentation at the 1993 Venice Biennale. A 2015 re-imagining of the work, *The Spirits of the Pumpkins Descended into the Heavens*, is a highlight of the NGV exhibition. Kusama’s pumpkins are often covered in polka dots, which represent myriad things: from the sun and the moon to the vibrating atoms and cells that constitute all living things.[2] Like other motifs from the natural world recurrent in Kusama’s art, pumpkins are tied to her fascination with life cycles, the universe and the interconnectedness of all beings.

Sprightlier than her earlier seated pumpkins, *Dancing Pumpkin* has legs. Their contorted forms recall the snake-like shapes in *The Hope of the Polka Dots Buried in Infinity Will Eternally Cover the Universe*, 2019, *Sex Obsession*, 1992, or even the fabric protuberances of Kusama’s early *Accumulation* sculptures created in 1960s New York. The addition of legs to this mainstay of Kusama’s visual language is emblematic of the continuity in her oeuvre and her unceasing drive to push her art ever further. *Dancing Pumpkin* is a highlight of Kusama’s ever-expanding engagement with the iconic pumpkin motif. Full of mischievous mirth, the enormous sculpture casts a rumbling shadow over the bluestone floor of the NGV Federation Court. One might imagine that after the gallery crowds have dispersed each evening, the pumpkin awakens from its frozen slumber – free to move again.

Coral Guan is NGV Curatorial Project Officer, International Exhibition Projects.

See *Dancing Pumpkin*, 2020, for free in Federation Court at NGV International. The NGV warmly acknowledges the Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund for supporting the acquisition of this work.

Installation view of **Yayoi Kusama**’s *Dancing Pumpkin*, 2020, as part of the *Yayoi Kusama* exhibition at NGV International, Melbourne. Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund, 2025 © YAYOI KUSAMA



Kusama for Kids
THE OBLITERATION ROOM

Yayoi Kusama's kaleidoscopic installation *The Obliteration Room*, 2002–, has taken over the NGV's dedicated children's gallery this summer, inviting everyone to 'obliterate' a white domestic interior by sticking multicoloured polka dots over every surface.

Words by **Kate Ryan**

Step inside the NGV children's gallery and you will find the space has been transformed into the interior of a typical Australian house. But the interiors are not so typical – everything from the floor, ceiling and light fixtures to the cabinets and the books on the shelves is painted white. These surfaces are the raw canvas that Yayoi Kusama has created for a participatory experience in which she invites everyone to cover, or 'obliterate', the space with colourful dots. Over the duration of the exhibition, the pristine white interior will become kaleidoscopic with coloured dots, gradually covering every surface in the room. Like a form of camouflage, the dots and the objects in the space change our perspective.

This is *The Obliteration Room*, an artwork first created by Kusama especially for children in Australia in 2002.[1] More than twenty years since its first iteration, the immersive installation has become one of the artist's most well known, and has been installed in galleries across the world, including the National Gallery of Singapore, 2017, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., 2017, and a takeover of the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, London in 2022. Every iteration of the artwork is designed to reflect its location, while many of the household items are sourced through donations and purchases made at local secondhand stores.

The Obliteration Room, like much of Kusama's art, relates to her childhood experiences in which her vision was interrupted with infinite repetitions of dots or other shapes. Kusama has noted that she first experienced this sensation when she saw the floral print of a tablecloth extend beyond the surface of the table, covering the ceiling, windows and entire room with the pattern.[2] Kusama has held a deep and profound fascination with polka dots and repeating patterns ever since, which she has translated to a variety of media including performance, drawing, painting, sculpture and installations such as *The Obliteration Room*. Other artworks dedicated to Kusama's early explorations of the dot motif are also featured in the exhibition, *Yayoi Kusama*.

The dot, fresh and bright, continues to delight people who encounter Kusama's work. *Lots of Dots is a* special book for early readers and toddlers published by the NGV in collaboration with the artist's studio especially for the *Yayoi Kusama* exhibition. Shaped like one of Kusama's famous yellow-and-black dotted pumpkins, the book features an array of tactile embellishments – mirror effects, felt flocked dots and circular cut-outs for little ones to touch and engage with Kusama's vibrant works of art.

Kate Ryan is NGV Curator of Children's Programs.

See *Kusama for Kids The Obliteration Room* at NGV International until 21 April. This free exhibition is supported by Major Partner Officeworks and Supporter City of Melbourne.

Yayoi Kusama *The Obliteration Room* 2002–.
Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art
© YAYOI KUSAMA

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NEW FIRST NATIONS ART

Through generous supporters of the 2024 NGV First Nations Art Dinner, eight works by leading First Nations artists and designers from across Australia join the NGV Collection. Here we share highlights.



proppaNOW
Richard Bell *Land Rights/Back* 2024

Established in 2003 in Brisbane, proppaNOW is one of Australia's leading cultural collectives, exploring the politics of Aboriginal art and culture, and provoking, subverting and re-thinking what it means to be a 'contemporary Aboriginal artist'. proppaNOW's first Box Set series marks the beginning of an ongoing collective project. Adhering to the group's core ethos, each work in the suite of nine serigraph prints presents a clear statement that challenges the politics of Aboriginal art while provoking further thoughts on societal issues. Richard Bell's *Land Rights/Back* 2024 is one work in the series. The NGV warmly thanks Christopher Thomas AM and Cheryl Thomas for their support.

Richard Bell *Land Rights/Back* 2024 From proppaNOW, *Box set* 2024. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with funds donated by Christopher Thomas AM and Cheryl Thomas © Richard Bell, courtesy Milani Gallery

John Prince Siddon
Took our children away 2024

Walmajarri artist John Prince Siddon came to painting later in life, after a horse-riding accident forced him to rethink life as a stockman across the Great Sandy Desert. Prince Siddon's psychedelic, surrealist paintings bring some of the most urgent themes of our time into piercing view. *Took our children away*, referencing Archie Roach's recognisable song, is an ode to First Nations mothers across Australia whose children have been forcibly and violently removed through colonial policies. The NGV warmly thanks Linda Herd and Canny Quine Foundation for their support.



John Prince Siddon *Took our children away* 2024. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with funds donated by Linda Herd and Canny Quine Foundation, 2024 © John Prince Siddon



Louise Malarvie
Paraku (Lake Gregory) 2024

Louise Malarvey's practice is informed by cultural learning taught to her by the Elders of her family. This work depicts Country – specifically Paraku, or Lake Gregory, in Western Australia's Great Sandy Desert – at night. The fine dotting and re-dotting of oche in hues of red, white and pink creates an amalgamation of subtle colour that alludes to an interplay of light and movement. Here, the brilliant skies of the Milky Way above the lake touch everything – both in the effect of the light, as well as in reference to the story of the Seven Sisters, who transformed into the Pleiades constellation. The NGV warmly thanks Barbara Hay and the Hay family for their support.

Louise Malarvie *Paraku (Lake Gregory)* 2024. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with funds donated by Barbara Hay and the Hay family.

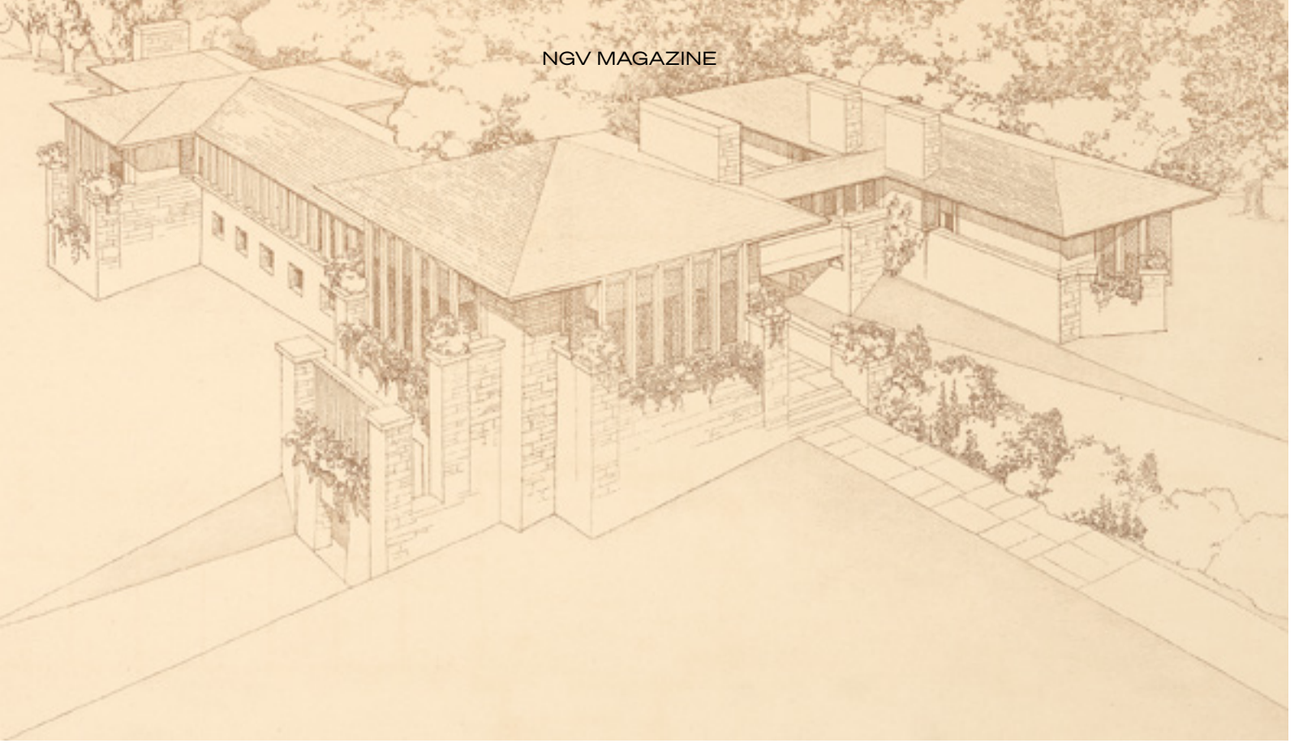
Mitch Mahoney
Kampitya (father), red gum canoe 2024

Mitch Mahoney is an emerging artist and a descendant of the Boonwurrung and Barkindji peoples of south-eastern Australia. Through *My Country*, the 2024 Country Road and NGV First Nations Commission, Mahoney realised an ambitious body of work including *Kampitya (father), red gum canoe*. The work represents Mahoney's connection to his paternal Country and community. The imagery on the inside of the canoe represents the Barka (Darling River) and the Menindee Lakes system: the heart of Barkindji Country. The outer imagery is of the two rivers reflecting shared pathways and the ways in which communities follow those who have come before. The NGV warmly thanks Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family and D'Lan Davidson and Rachal Jacobs for their support. The NGV also thanks Country Road for supporting the Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions for which this work was first created.

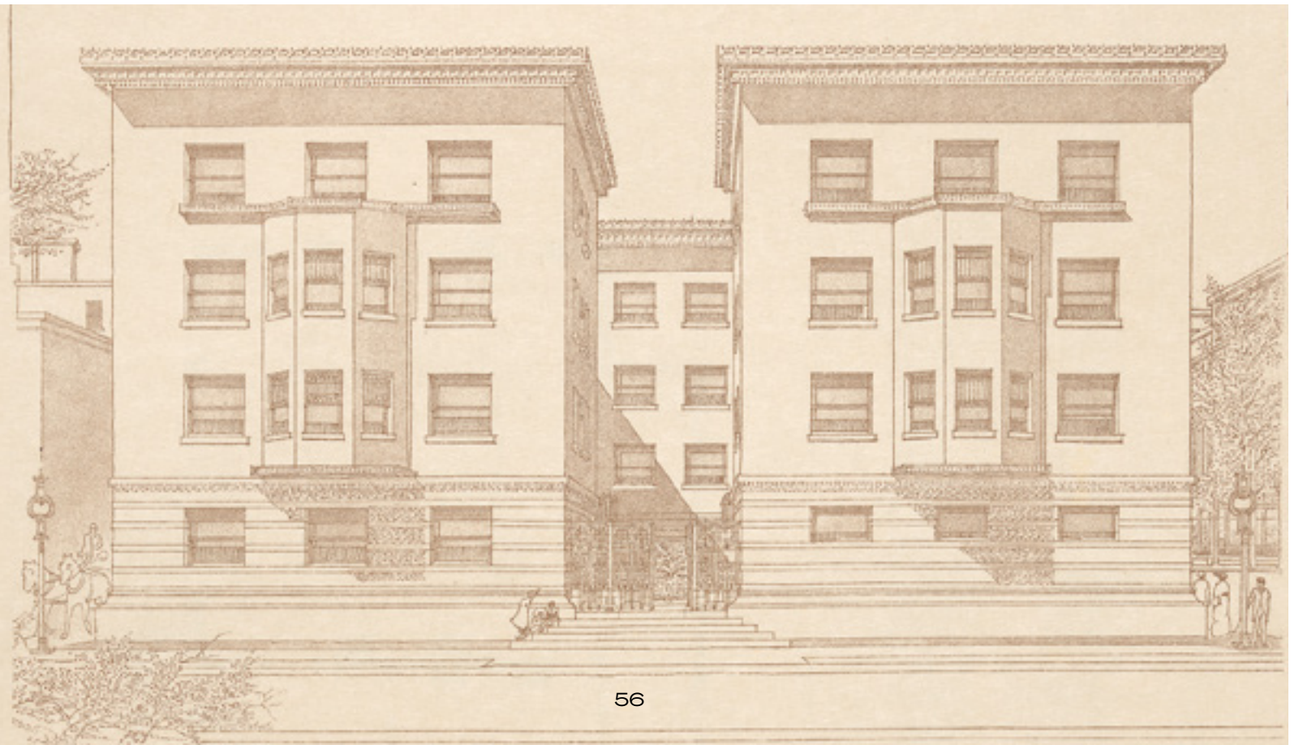
See these works on display at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia. The NGV warmly thanks all supporters of the 2024 First Nations Art Dinner for acquiring these works for the NGV Collection.



Artist **Mitch Mahoney** with his work *Kampitya (Father), Red gum canoe* at the opening of *My Country: Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions* at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia. Purchased with funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-AM and Family and D'Lan Davidson and Rachal Jacobs. Photo: Margund Sallowsky



Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT



Executed buildings and designs by Frank Lloyd Wright (Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright), 1910, is recognised as one of the twentieth century's most significant publications on design and architecture. Commonly referred to the *Wasmuth Portfolio*, a copy of the rare work recently joined the NGV Collection with the generous support of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family.

Words by **Imogen Mallia-Valjan**

The *Wasmuth Portfolio* was the first time in which Frank Lloyd Wright's building designs were published and distributed. The two-volume publication comprises an introduction by Wright, a listing of each plate and 100 lithographs printed on tissue and paper.

First published by Ernst Wasmuth in Berlin, 650 copies of the folio were printed, 500 of which were sent to the United States for Wright to circulate. This number was diminished, however, in 1914, when a fire broke out in Wright's Taliesin Studio, where he was storing many of the folios. As a result, partial copies remain in circulation, but complete versions of this first edition are rare. The folio was later reissued in 1963 by Horizon Press.

Inspired by the prairie grasslands of the American Midwest, architect and designer Frank Lloyd Wright aimed to develop the first uniquely American style. The *Wasmuth Portfolio* showcases detailed renders of Wright's pioneering approach to

‘The drawings themselves hold significant merit in demonstrating how artists can transform a building through the addition of foliage and manipulated perspectives’

Imogen Mallia-Valjan

American architecture, which became known as the Prairie Style. These illustrations were not intended for use by architects and builders, but rather for exhibition and as a means for Wright to present his work to clients – to provide examples of finished buildings, which otherwise might have been difficult to gain from detailed plans. The drawings themselves hold significant merit in demonstrating how artists can transform buildings through the addition of foliage and manipulated perspectives.

Despite Wright’s acclaim as an architect, there is little concrete information surrounding the authorship of the *Wasmuth Portfolio* drawings. At Wright’s studio, renders were produced by a number of architects, and not necessarily those working on the design of a building. Moreover, many weren’t signed by the responsible architects, making it difficult to attribute many of the drawings. Some of the architects who may have contributed to the *Wasmuth Portfolio* renderings include Birch Burdette Long, William E. Drummond and Harry Robinson. However, only one of Wright’s employees is definitively known to have contributed to the drawings in the portfolio and that was Marion Mahony. Her monogram, MLM, can be seen on several of the renders, including plate fourteen of volume one, where it sits within the trees of *A fireproof house for $5,000*.

Mahony was only the second woman in the United States to earn an architectural degree, from which she graduated in 1894, and in 1898 she was the first to gain a professional licence to practise. After graduating, she worked at her cousin Dwight Perkins’s studio before joining Wright in 1895. A talented architect and designer in her own right, Mahony quickly garnered attention for her rendering skills.

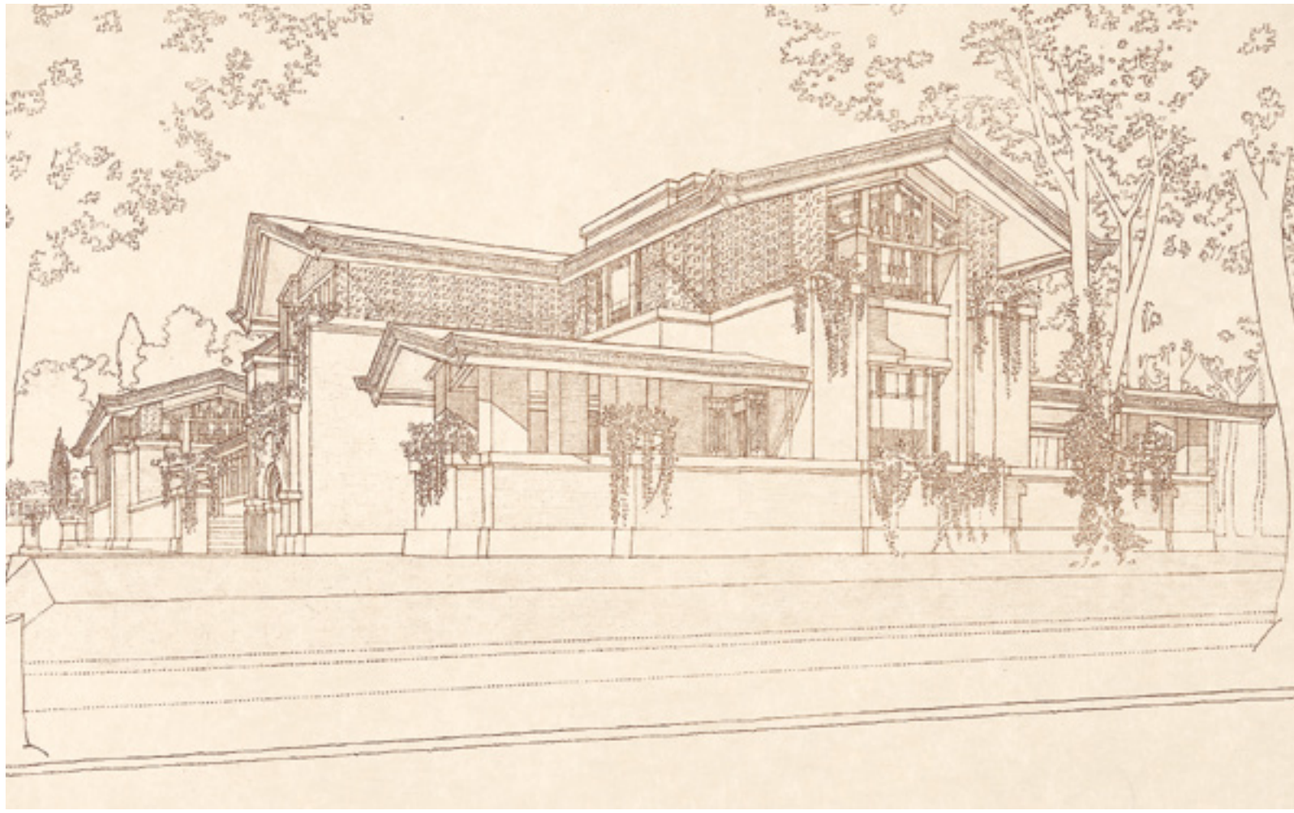
She had a unique and progressive style of representing and contextualising buildings to prospective clients that is now synonymous with this early period of Wright’s own career. Her unique style of rendering foliage to capture individual leaves and blades of grass situates her buildings within a sprawling natural world. Some of her renders even partially obscure the buildings with bushes and trees, an approach that became internationally recognised following the publication of the *Wasmuth Portfolio*. While compiling the folio, Wright worked with a number of artists and draftspeople to recast existing drawings for publication. In some cases, this meant adjusting the drawings, but Mahony’s were often traced directly from her originals.

In his discussion on the *Wasmuth Portfolio,* architectural historian H. Allen Brooks refers to evidence for some of Mahony’s monograms having been removed by Wright prior to publication of the portfolio. For example, in locating the original rendering of the K. C. de Rhodes House, which had been published in 1906, Brooks notes that the Mahony monogram present on this rendering was subsequently removed from the same rendering that Wright published in 1910 as part of the *Wasmuth Portfolio*. An additional inscription on the original drawing written in Wright’s hand reads ‘Drawn by Mahony after FLW and Hiroshige’. Although this does acknowledge Mahony as the artist, Wright still asserts himself as the architect.

Following the publication of the *Wasmuth Portfolio*, Mahony’s approach to rendering was used extensively among the architects of the Prairie School, including those outside of Wright’s studio. Despite the acclaim Wright gained because of the publication of the folio, this recognition may be partially attributable to Mahony’s progressive approach to architectural rendering.

Imogen Mallia-Valjan is NGV Curatorial Project Officer, International Decorative Arts and Design.

See works by Frank Lloyd Wright and Marion Mahony on Level 2, NGV International. The NGV warmly thanks Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family for acquiring the portfolio *Executed buildings and designs by Frank Lloyd Wright (Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright)* 1910 for the NGV Collection.





(p. 56 and p. 59) **Frank Lloyd Wright** (designer) **Ernst Wasmuth, Berlin** (publisher) *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright (Wasmuth Portfolio, Volumes 1 and 2)* 1910–11. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through the Australian Government’s Cultural Gifts Program, 2024 © Frank Lloyd Wright Estate/ARS, New York. Licensed by Copyright Agency, Australia



Gemma Smith, *Bask*

Australian artist Gemma Smith has, over two decades, developed a body of work that is both technical and organic. Here she speaks with NGV Curator of Contemporary Art Amita Kirpalani about her first work to join the NGV Collection, *Bask*, 2023, through the Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists.

Interview by **Amita Kirpalani**

AMITA KIRPALANI **Painters tend to be 'close lookers' – returning again and again to the work of other painters. Does this also describe your way of looking?**

GEMMA SMITH When I look at other artists' work, the process of looking is often associated with unpacking how a work was made – material questions, as well as thinking through the types of decisions that may have been made and what the results were. Because I'm not able to conjure an image in my mind (a condition called aphantasia), the looking becomes key and is associated with coming to terms with other artists' processes.

I value the act of looking at a painting in its presence. So much is lost in reproduction. Painting becomes sterile, far from its messy, visceral self. Expanses of colour operate differently at scale. I also keenly observe technical details and the way the painting is shown.

AK **Of all your work, *Bask* seems most like a self-portrait. This most recent body of work, *Orbits*, appears to be, in part, about your body, specifically your physical reach. Could you describe this?**

GS This is a valid point, because of this work's relationship to the body. The scale of the recent works has a relationship to my physical reach, particular gestures and the tools that

I'm using – large, raspy brushes that cover a vast area in a single layer only to be sculpted back in with a cloth. But, for me, in making the work, the gestures aren't indexical. I don't see them as evidence of a painting performance I made in the studio. The paintings are culminations of compositional decisions – added, erased, modified, each gesture produced at speed – but each painting the product of months of daily layers. Some of these layers are buried, not visible anymore.

I also moderate my tools so that they relate to the scale of the painting. For *Triple tangle*, 2018, a 16-metre foyer-wall painting at the Museum of Contemporary Art, I increased my own capabilities by attaching a paintbrush to a pole, making my reach giant-like. At the end, the composition did not function as a trace of my movement around the wall, it was more about the space, the light and the way people engage with the work.

AK **Can you describe your technique in more detail?**

GS The paintings are made through the accumulation of many single layers, each applied daily. I start by mixing a colour in response to what I can see in front of me. I extend and enhance the translucent properties of the paint by adding acrylic binder. Using a large, raspy brush I cover a vast area of the painting in a single gestural layer – only to sculpt back in, shaping the space using great arc-like sweeping motions with the full reach of my arm using a cloth wipe, erasing superfluous areas.

With this larger scale of work, I am also moving across or down the work as I sweep. I give myself mere moments to decide whether I immediately wash off the whole plane of colour and go again with a slightly different approach, or leave it as is – the faster the decision, the more intuitive the response. As soon as this decision is made, I manoeuvre the stretcher so it lays flat on the ground to dry. The following day, repeat, and so on, sometimes for months. This work, *Bask*, was particularly physical.

AK **Could you talk a little about the colour palette of *Orbits*?**

GS The unexpected nature of working with colour and its interactions is what engages me in this work. I set up scenarios to surprise myself by overlaying acrylic glazes. I am fascinated by murky interactions of colour – a cobalt purple over a bushy green – and how they sit against high-key bright colours, sometimes only allowing hints of what's happening below.

At the outset I had the idea to make these four large paintings each a monochrome painting, using just one colour for each work. *Bask* was to be quinacridone burnt orange. I would allow the varying density of overlaid layers and their graphic edge-lines to build the composition. However, I often work against my will in the moment, and *Bask* broke from my preconceived plan for it. I could not help broadening *Bask*'s spectrum of colours.

AK **The title of your survey exhibition, *Rhythm Sequence* (curated by Jose Da Silva for University of New South Wales), seems to communicate, in part, the way that time operates in your studio. You've described your experimentation process, which appears full of risk and game-playing. Does each body of work tend to commit to a specific pattern of fast and slow – a kind of rhythm sequence?**

GS Time works differently in the studio. I somehow lose hours. These paintings are incredibly slow to evolve, though my daily work with them feels fast – decisions must be made quickly before the paint begins to dry.

While I consciously encourage some works in the studio to be more intuitive and free, I double down on others, really bossing them around. I slowly, joyously agonise over colour shifts, both vast and incremental, playing out each change fully before either accepting it or, most often, rejecting it.

AK **Your work often demands a closer inspection. Subtleties of line, shape and colour emerge with subsequent viewings.**

GS For me it's about trying to surprise myself or discover something. I love the feeling of being delighted by chance interactions of colours I'd never expected or aimed for. In fact, if I feel a methodology becomes too much of a known quantity, I'll shift it. I'll make rules or ban an approach or material in the studio, making it more likely I'll arrive somewhere unexpected.

I set up games to find compositions too. For example, I use clear coats of paint with different gloss levels to make an invisible painting over a gestural ground and then paint out areas to see what I can discover. *Bask* was titled for the feeling I had standing in front of it, being enveloped by a glow!

Amita Kirpalani is NGV Curator, Contemporary Art. Gemma Smith is Sydney-based painter and sculptor.

See Gemma Smith's *Bask*, 2023, at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia.

Gemma Smith *Bask* 2023 joins the NGV Collection through the Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists.



(pp. 60–61) Gemma Smith in her Artspace Sydney studio 2024. Photo: Anna Kucera

(p. 63) Installation view of **Gemma Smith** *Bask* 2023 at Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Image courtesy of Milani Gallery and Gemma Smith. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. NGV Collection, purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists

William Blake

Romantic Visionary

William Blake is one of the greatest figures of the Romantic era, an artist and poet whose work is known for its highly original and charged metaphorical expression. His art was often met with incomprehension beyond a small circle of early supporters, and the first commentators after his death in 1827 portrayed him as a mystic and suffering outsider. As NGV Senior Curator Cathy Leahy explains, the NGV's collection of works by William Blake, generously gifted through the Felton Bequest, stands as one of the Gallery's greatest and best-loved treasures.

Words by **Cathy Leahy**

William Blake is one of the great figures in British art and literature. His visionary art and poetry explored the metaphysical realm, giving rise to some of the most powerful and original work of his time. Imagination was of supreme importance to Blake, who believed that art must proceed from inner visions and not the empirical observation of nature. He made watercolours of great expressive beauty as well as drawings, prints, tempera paintings and hand-printed books of prophetic poetry in which he presented his highly personal and apocalyptic mythology. Blake's independence of mind not only fuelled his own inventions but also made him a highly original illustrator of the Bible and the poetry of Milton and Dante, among others.

Blake was born in 1757 to a Soho hosier who recognised his son's early artistic talents and sent him at the age of ten to the drawing school of Henry Pars. He was then apprenticed in 1772 to James Basire, the well-known but conservative engraver to the Society of Antiquaries, where he spent seven years learning the techniques of reproductive engraving. This would provide him with the means of earning a modest living throughout his life, executing book illustrations and engravings after other artists' designs. Following his apprenticeship he briefly attended the schools of the Royal Academy, where he formed important friendships with other young artists, such as John Flaxman, Thomas Stothard and George Cumberland, who shared his interest in Classical art and his radical political sympathies. Blake had begun writing poetry at an early age, and with Flaxman's assistance found patrons who helped to privately publish his first collection of poems in 1783. This followed his marriage in August 1782 to Catherine Boucher, the illiterate daughter of a market gardener. Their relationship was to prove a long and happy one, with Catherine a devoted wife and assistant in Blake's printing operations.

In the late 1780s Blake began designing hand-printed books that brought together the twin aspects of his immense talent – his poetry and his art. In order to integrate the two elements on the page, he invented the new technique of relief etching with which he achieved a unity of text and illustration that was unprecedented in the history of the printed book. Blake and Boucher hand-coloured copies of the books so that no two were identical; this, however, meant editions were small and the books reached only a limited audience during Blake's lifetime. *Songs of Innocence*, 1789, was one of the earliest examples, and Blake went on to produce a further eleven



William Blake Plate 21 *Los, Enitharmon and Orc* c. 1795, from *The First Book of Urizen* re-issued as part of *The Large Book of Designs*, copy B 1794. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Felton Bequest, 1920



William Blake Plate 6, *Satan smiting Job with Boils* 1823–26; from *Illustrations of The Book of Job*, published 1826. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Felton Bequest, 1920

illuminated books in a period of intense productivity that lasted until the mid 1790s.

The later illuminated books became more complex and increasingly began to reflect Blake's religious and political ideas. His family background was of a dissenting form of Protestantism, which challenged the hierarchical structures of official religion, and this influenced Blake's fierce independence, throughout his life, from orthodoxies of all kinds. Around 1787 the artist was briefly drawn to the doctrines of the influential Swedish visionary Emanuel Swedenborg, although he never joined the Swedenborgian Church and soon became disillusioned with it. At this time Blake was also in contact with the circle of radical thinkers and writers associated with the publisher Joseph Johnson that included Thomas Paine, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft and others. He sympathised with their ideals, in particular their support of the American and French Revolutions, which he saw as overturning social and religious restrictions. The upheaval of these times was reflected in the series of epic prophetic books that Blake began in 1793 in which revolution is posited as an apocalyptic stage in the history and redemption of mankind. Parallels with contemporary political events appear in *America A Prophecy* and *Europe A Prophecy* (both 1793), while later books became increasingly prophetic and gave expression to Blake's own personal mythology. *The First Book of Urizen* (1794) and other illuminated books use his invented cast of characters to explore the troubled state of mankind through complex creation and redemption narratives.

By the end of the 1790s Blake was receiving little commercial engraving work and was becoming increasingly dependent upon private patronage. In 1799 he received a commission for fifty biblical paintings from the civil servant Thomas Butts, who went on to become his most significant patron and main form of support over the next decade and a half. Butt commissioned further biblical subjects and several important series illustrating Milton and other authors, eventually paying Blake a regular stipend in return for more than 135 watercolour and tempera paintings. From 1800 to 1803 Blake lived in the seaside village of Felpham, Sussex, at the behest of Flaxman's wealthy patron William Hayley. This period was crucial for the later development of his work – it was here he began conceiving his last two epic illuminated books, *Milton* (c.1804–1810/11) and *Jerusalem* (c.1804–c.1820) – although Blake increasingly resented Hayley's discouragement of his creative work and the menial tasks his patron set him. Upon his return to London, Blake was keen to seek a broader public for his work and embarked upon a series of ambitious projects. The first, a series of designs and engravings for an edition of the popular poem 'The Grave' by Robert Blair (1808), ended in bitter dispute with the publisher, who was also involved in Blake's next unsuccessful venture, his large engraving of *Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims* (1810), which failed to sell. In his final bid for public recognition Blake mounted a one-man exhibition at his brother's house in London in 1809, but this was scarcely noticed, receiving only one hostile review.

Following the failure of this exhibition Blake retired from public view for nearly a decade, only taking on some minor reproductive work and continuing with several series of illustrations to *Milton for Butts*. The isolation of these years was eased in 1818 when Blake was befriended by the landscape painter John Linnell. He introduced Blake to a wider circle of patrons and artists, including the young artists calling themselves 'The Ancients' (Samuel Palmer, George Richmond and Edward Calvert), who had real sympathy for Blake's visionary style of art. Linnell also secured commissions for the elder artist such as the wood engravings for Thornton's *Virgil* (1821) and provided him with a series of creative projects that occupied his final years. The most significant of these was the series of engraved illustrations to the Book of Job that Blake executed between 1823 and 1825 and the series of 102 illustrations to Dante's *The Divine Comedy* of 1824–27. Despite ongoing poverty and bouts of illness, these final years were marked by renewed creative energy and a flowering of Blake's art, seen in watercolours, prints and late impressions of his illuminated books. Blake died, aged sixty-nine years, on 12 August 1827.

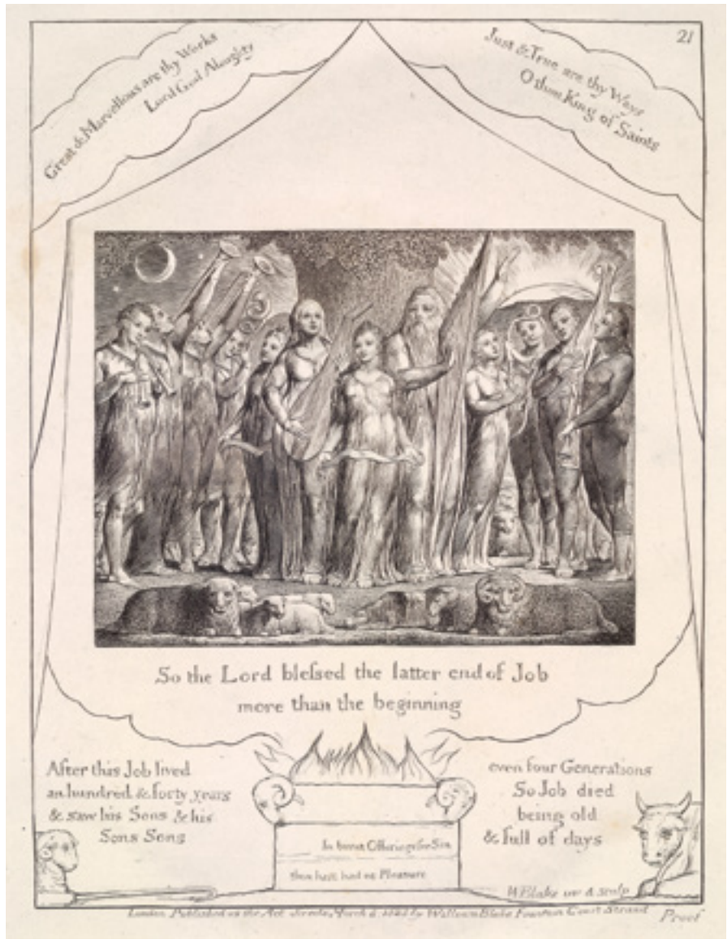
THORNTON'S *VIRGIL*

> They are visions of little dells and nooks, and corners of Paradise; models of the exquisitest pitch of intense poetry.
> – Samuel Palmer[2]

The first major commission that John Linnell helped Blake secure was for a set of wood-engraved illustrations to Thornton's *Virgil*. In 1819 Linnell recommended Blake to Dr Robert John Thornton (the Linnell family's physician), who was about to publish a third edition, newly illustrated, of his school text *The Pastorals of Virgil* that was first published in 1812. The second and third editions included Virgil's Latin verses together with 'imitations' of the poetry by various English authors. Blake was commissioned to illustrate the imitation of *Eclogue I* by Ambrose Philips, for which he executed seventeen wood engravings that were published in 1821; fourteen of these are in the NGV Collection.

Blake had not previously worked in wood engraving but his long use of relief etching on copper and white-line engraving determined his approach to the medium. Unlike the conventional wood engraver, who would incise meticulously carved fine lines into the block, Blake worked in a much freer and more rugged fashion. He cut his blocks using the white-line technique, so that the design is carried by the white lines that are cut away to contrast with the printed black background. This technique, and the expressive qualities of these white lines, which directly convey the energy of the artist's hand, accounts for the highly atmospheric nature of the works. Their departure from the standard wood-engraving conventions was little appreciated by Dr Thornton, however, who apparently was only dissuaded from rejecting the blocks because they were so highly regarded by a small circle of artists. This explains the disclaimer he published in the book: 'The Illustrations ... are by the famous Blake ... who designed and engraved them himself. This is mentioned, as they display less of art than genius, and are much admired by some eminent painters'.

These tiny works are unusual in Blake's oeuvre for their landscape subjects and their pastoral qualities, which were greatly admired by contemporary artists such as Samuel Palmer and Edward Calvert. The vision the works present is not as idyllic as Palmer's 'corners of Paradise' would suggest, however, as they are pervaded by a melancholy air that matches the mood and details of Philips's poetry.



William Blake *Job and his Wife restored to Prosperity* 1823–1826; published 1826, plate 21 from *Illustrations of The Book of Job*. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Felton Bequest, 1920

‘Although Blake had long been aware of the work of Dante, by the time he embarked upon his series of illustrations in 1824 *The Divine Comedy* was only just becoming more widely read in England’

Cathy Leahy

The despondency of the young poet-shepherd Colinet and the harshness of nature described by Philips, with its riven tree and blighted crops, are brilliantly conveyed in Blake’s evocative wood engravings. The predominantly black backgrounds in particular provide the works with a sombre moodiness that enhances their power of poetic suggestion.

The NGV’s (incomplete) set is a composite group that may have been compiled from a dismembered copy (or copies) of the book or from later printings from the blocks (Linnell had bought these from Thornton in 1825 and many later impressions were pulled). The final work, *Unyoked heifers loitering homeward, low* is an unusual and very lightly printed impression that has been sensitively finished with watercolour; it has been suggested that this may have been done by Edward Calvert.

THE BOOK OF JOB

> Why is the Bible more Entertaining & Instructive than any other Book? Is it because [it is] addressed to the Imagination, which is spiritual sensation …?
> – Blake, letter to Dr Trusler, 23 August 1799

Another of John Linnell’s major commissions from Blake was for a series of engraved illustrations to the Book of Job. Blake had executed a set of watercolours on this subject for Thomas Butts in c. 1805–06, and in 1821 Linnell commissioned a second series for his own collection, tracing the designs himself which Blake subsequently coloured. This in turn led to the plan for the engravings, for which a contract was drawn up in March 1823 stipulating that Linnell would pay Blake £5 per plate or £100 for the set, plus a further £100 from the profits. Blake worked for two years on the twenty-two plates, which were published in early 1826 in an edition of 315 sets on varying papers. The NGV’s set is one of eighteen that had remained in the Linnell family collection and it comprises exceptionally fine, early proof impressions. These have been carefully printed and reveal the great subtlety and sophistication of Blake’s burin work.

Blake had long admired the engravings of the early masters of the medium, such as Marcantonio Raimondi and, in particular, Albrecht Dürer. He renewed his study of these artists in the 1820s and this is reflected in the new technical mastery and complexity of the Job plates. He dispensed with his earlier method of laying in the composition with preliminary etching, thereby more closely aligning his work with the pure engraving of his esteemed masters. He also introduced an extraordinary new diversity of burin work in the plates, from long sinuous lines to those of varying length, width and strength as well as crosshatching and staccato flicks of the tool. With these he overturned the mechanically repetitive patterns that had long dominated reproductive engraving and substantially increased the medium’s capacity to describe surfaces, textures and different light effects.

The Book of Job is Blake’s final work in which text and images are integrated into the one design. The engravings give primacy to the images, but the series’ most unusual feature is the way in which the borders are used to carry quotes and adaptations from biblical texts to emphasise points of meaning in the narrative. Blake’s series is a complex, personal interpretation of the Book of Job that has parallels with his own mythology, particularly as expressed in his epic poem *Jerusalem* (1804–c. 1820). He presents Job as a fallen man who is cut off from the true spiritual dimension of existence and who must endure suffering before achieving redemption. Job’s spiritual awakening is paralleled in Blake’s narrative with his belief in the centrality of the poetic vision, or inspiration. Job’s mistaken focus on the material world and the outward observance of religion is referred to in the opening plate in the family’s conventional, pious poses and the musical instruments (symbols of inspiration) hanging unused on the tree. It is only after suffering torments that Job realises the false nature of his faith and is finally restored to prosperity and a new existence, as seen in the final plate, where he and his family are depicted in joyful activity, singing and making music.

DANTE’S *THE DIVINE COMEDY*

> On Saturday, 9th October, 1824, Mr Linnell called and went with me to Mr Blake. We found him lame in bed, of a scalded foot (or leg). There, not inactive, though sixty-seven years old, but hard-working on a bed covered with books sat he up like one of the Antique patriarchs, or a dying Michel Angelo. Thus and there was he making in the leaves of a great book (folio) the sublimest design from his (not superior) Dante.
> – Samuel Palmer

Blake was commissioned by John Linnell in 1824 to execute a series of illustrations to *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri. The series remained unfinished at the time of Blake’s death in August 1827; he left 102 sheets in varying stages of completion, ranging from finished watercolours to rough pencil sketches, as well as seven unfinished engravings. Dante’s epic poem narrates the story of his journey, guided by the Roman poet Virgil, through Hell and Purgatory to Paradise, where he is reunited with his idealised love, Beatrice. The imaginative vision of Dante’s masterpiece clearly impressed Blake, in particular the description of Hell and its torments: to this he dedicated seventy-two of his illustrations, illustrating Purgatory with only twenty sheets and Paradise with ten. Although unfinished, this series is the crowning achievement of Blake’s career, his mature creative genius giving powerful visual form to Dante’s literary masterpiece.



William Blake *Dante at the Moment of entering the Fire* 1824–27 illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri (*Purgatorio* XXVII, pp. 46–8 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Felton Bequest, 1920

Although Blake had long been aware of the work of Dante, by the time he embarked upon his series of illustrations in 1824 *The Divine Comedy* was only just becoming more widely read in England. The first full English translation, by Henry Cary, had been published in 1814 and was reaching new audiences and inspiring poets such as Coleridge and Shelley as well as artists. We know that Blake used Cary’s translation but that he also taught himself Italian in order to be able to read the original (some inscriptions in Italian are found on the drawings).

Despite Blake’s great admiration for the poet and his imaginative vision of Hell, there were elements of Dante’s theology of which he disapproved, in particular his notion of retributive justice and salvation. Blake’s belief in redemption through forgiveness was fundamentally opposed to the retribution and punishment inherent in Dante’s conception of Hell. Blake voiced his criticism of this aspect of Dante’s text in scribbled notes on one of the drawings: ‘Whatever Book is for Vengeance for Sin & whatever Book is Against the Forgiveness of Sins is not



William Blake *Dante running from the Three Beasts* (1824–1827) illustration for *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri (Inferno 1, 1–90). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Felton Bequest, 1920

of the Father, but of Satan the Accuser & Father of Hell'. He also accused Dante of being too engaged with the material world, as yet another inscription revealed: 'Dante's Commedia shews That for Tyrannical Purposes he has made This World the Foundation of All, & the Goddess Nature is his Inspirer and not Imagination'. These and other criticisms Blake made have engendered much scholarly debate concerning the extent to which Blake's cycle went beyond literal illustration to form a commentary on Dante's poem. While some commentators have read individual illustrations and the cycle as a whole as a coded presentation of Blake's visionary universe, others have argued for a more direct illustration of the text. Although it seems that Blake's engagement with Dante went beyond mere literal illustration, he clearly respected Dante's text, reading it carefully and faithfully recording many of its details.

The Dante watercolours of 1824–27 have an expressive force that is realised as much through their imaginative conception as through the great subtlety and richness of Blake's technique. In finished watercolours, such as *Dante running from the Three Beasts*, flowing washes are combined with point-of-brush work to create sonorous jewel-like colour and variegated textures. These are used to underscore Blake's evocation of the material world in this opening scene, but are equally as powerful in rendering the murky gloom and sombre atmosphere of the underworld in *The Vestibule of Hell and the Souls mustering to cross the Acheron*. The density of the technique in these works contrasts markedly with the translucent rainbow colours and limpid washes Blake uses to evoke the ethereal world of Paradise at the end of the cycle.

Cathy Leahy is NGV Senior Curator, Prints and Drawings.

The NGV warmly thanks the Felton Bequest for gifting the William Blake works discussed.

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RICHARD AVEDON

Renée, The new look of Dior, Place de la Concorde, Paris, August 1947



New York born and based photographer Richard Avedon was fascinated by photography's capacity for evoking life. His work, which graced the pages of *Harper's Bazaar, Vogue* and *The New Yorker* throughout the twentieth century, was celebrated for its movement. Avedon brought his subjects to life in still pictures, like the model Renée Breton, featured in *Renée, The New Look of Dior, Place de la Concorde, Paris', August 1947*, which joins the NGV Collection through the support of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family.

Words by **Maggie Finch**

Born in 1923 in New York City, Richard Avedon began photographing in camera clubs as a teenager. After joining the United States Merchant Marine in 1942 he served as Photographer's Mate Second Class during the Second World War, photographing thousands of portraits of servicemen for ID purposes. In 1944 he left the Merchant Marine, launching a career as a professional photographer, particularly in the field of fashion images.

One of his earliest and most significant clients was the American women's fashion magazine Harper's Bazaar. Avedon soon demonstrated his versatility in working in a range of conditions, often preferring to work with models in real-life locations: in public spaces, on the street, at circuses, in bars and nightclubs. Avedon also reveled in the capacity of photography to capture the personality of his subjects – his photographs show models being playful, active and natural in their movements – resulting in a unique sense of spontaneity in his images.

In August 1947 Avedon travelled to Paris on assignment for *Harper's Bazaar*. Through the assistance of the magazine's editor, Carmel Snow, Avedon created numerous images of models wearing garments by French couturier Christian Dior, who had debuted his first collection in February of that year – a show that was celebrated as transforming postwar fashion. Dubbed the 'New Look' by Snow, the collection was criticised by some as extravagant in its generous use of fabrics while austerity and rationing was still in force, and praised by others as heralding a new era of confidence and optimism for fashion, women and the city. It was the beginning of a long-term association between Avedon and Dior, with their careers interweaving and impacting each other over the subsequent decades.

One of the iconic images created during that summer in Paris was Avedon's *Renée, the New Look of Dior, Place de la Concorde, Paris, August 1947*. The photograph depicts the model Renée Breton wearing a Dior skirt suit in the famed public square in Paris. From a slightly elevated perspective, Avedon shoots Renée with her back to the camera as she gently twists, sending her skirt, with its excess fabric swinging in an undulating circle around her. Three young men wearing suits stride past her – one looking into the camera, one at the model. Beyond them, the presence of two others are indicated by their encroaching shadows, adding to the sense of dynamism as the swing of the fabric, the movement of the pedestrians, and the lines of the shadows and paving stones all combine to create an energetic and graphic play of shapes and forms and movement.

An alternate photograph from this shoot, which showed the model from the waist down, her swinging skirt overlaid with the shadow of a nearby balustrade, eventually appeared in the October 1947 issue of *Harper's Bazaar*. However, this version was included in Avedon's 1978 Paris portfolio of photographs, in which he selected eleven works made between 1947–57 to be reissued in limited editions on the occasion of his retrospective exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Maggie Finch is NGV Curator, Photography.

The NGV warmly thanks Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family for their support in acquiring Richard Avedon's *'Renée, The New Look of Dior, Place de la Concorde, Paris', August 1947*, 1947, printed 1978, for the Collection.

Richard Avedon *Renée, The new look of Dior, Place de la Concorde, Paris, August 1947* 1978. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2024 © The Estate of Richard Avedon



Throughout the history of art, love has taken different forms, transmitting a multitude of messages. Whether capturing pain or pleasure, artists the world over have never shied away from romance as a subject. Here, we explore a handful of love-inspired works from the NGV Collection.

Words by **Elisa Scarton**

(p. 74) **Robert Indiana** *Love* 1965. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Gift of Daniel Thomas, 2009 © Robert Indiana/ARS, New York. Licensed by Copyright Agency, Australia

In a colour woodblock from c. 1785 two lovers lean over a balcony in a sweet embrace, taking in the blooming trees and rooftops of the homes around them. The work is called *Lovers on a balcony* and it's by Katsukawa Shunchō, one of the great masters of *ukiyo-e*, a genre of Japanese art that flourished from the seventeenth through to the nineteenth century.

As founder of the Katsukawa School, Shunchō was a pivotal print artist, accomplished painter and influential teacher of, most notably, a talented student by the name of Shunro (aka Hokusai).

Shunchō was particularly known for his *bijin-ga*, or 'pictures of beautiful women' and indeed the woman in *Lovers on a balcony* has a beautifully shaped face, with long black hair held in a bun by a yellow comb. Her robes of purple and red are so vivid that initially you fail to notice that the couple are naked from the waist down. This is perhaps unsurprising given the work is part of a series titled *Twelve hours of love-making* c. 1785.

Aside from warrior prints, images of sumo wrestlers and depictions of the theatrical stars of eighteenth-century Japan, Shunchō produced many *shunga* over his lifetime. These erotic woodblock prints created a seemingly unproblematic world of sexual wish fulfillment. Their name, *shunga*, translates to 'spring pictures', as spring was a Japanese euphemism for sex.[1]

Playful eroticism and romantic entanglements are a common thread through art history. A perennial fan favourite in the NGV Collection by Master of the Stories of Helen Antonio Vivarini, *The Garden of Love,* c. 1465–70 (gifted by the Felton Bequest) features an elegantly dressed young woman filling a delicate glass syringe with water from a fountain. Late medieval and Renaissance art often pictures lovers playing flirtatious games in lush, secluded gardens. In this case, the symbolism is hard to pin down, but it's thought that the syringe may represent male genitalia, while the bright-eyed dog nearby portrays female seduction.[2]

For much of the early modern period in Europe, the direct representation of everyday human sexuality was proscribed, either legally or through forces of social control. Except, that is, when presented through the acceptable



(above) **Donato Barcaglia** *Love is blind (Amore accieca)* c. 1875. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Gift of Carol Sisson through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2020

prisms of Classical myth like that depicted in Donato Barcaglia's *Love is blind (Amore accieca)*, c. 1875 (a gift of Carol Sisson). This particularly delightful marble statue, which you can see on Level 2 at NGV International, depicts a naked woman at the mercy of a very persistent Cupid, whose chubby childlike hands are firmly placed over her eyes. Cupid is winged, according to legend, because lovers are flighty and changeable, and childlike because love is easily influenced and beguiled. Rather than strike this hapless woman with his arrow, Cupid has chosen to shield her eyes, blindingly her to her potential lover's faults and imperfections.

Created across oceans and continents from Barcaglia's sculpture, another work depicts a different god of love, the Hindu god Krishna and his chief consort (*shakti*), Radha. This opaque watercolour and gold paint paper work (gifted by the Felton Bequest) from Udaipur, Rajasthan is by an unknown Indian artist. It's called *Krishna and Rhada from a Sur Sagar* series c. 1700–10, the *Sursagar* being a collection of poems based on the stories of the childhood of Krishna. Radha too is a goddess of love, and in this work, she and Krisha appear over and over, an array of beautifully rendered figures, some of which are dancing or conversing, others wrapped in a sweet embrace or resting on a garland festooned dais.

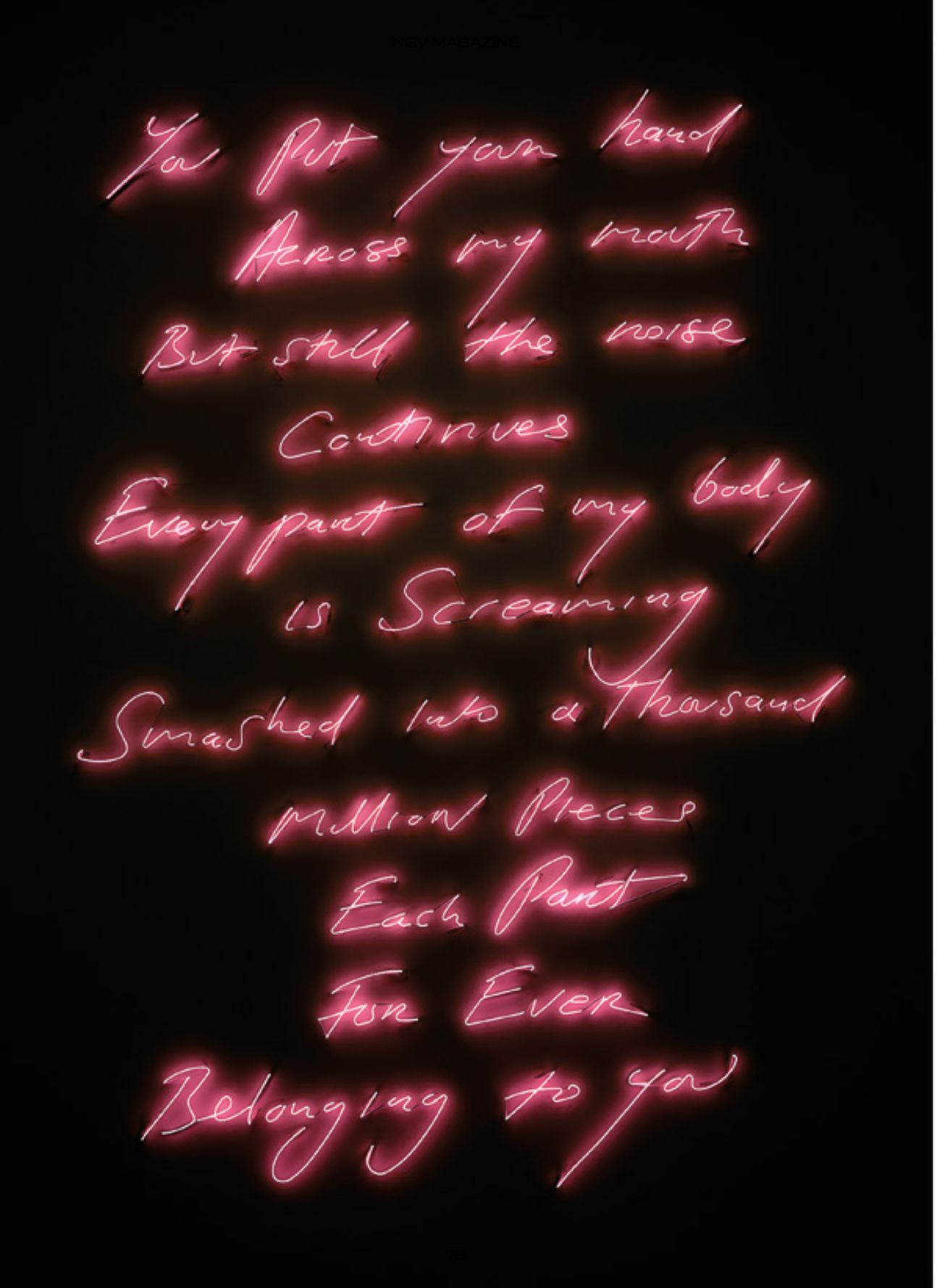
In the centre of the work perched in the trees is a lone figure who ties the *Krishna and Rhada from a Sur Sagar* series unexpectedly to Barcaglia's *Love is blind.* He is armed with an arrow, its red tipped flower pointed squarely at Radha. This is Kamadeva, the handsome Hindu god of erotic love, desire, pleasure and beauty, often dubbed the 'Indian Cupid'.

In more recent depictions from the NGV Collection, love is tinged in pain and loss, insecurity and tragedy. *Midnight Sun meets and marries Imdeduya, the most beautiful woman,* 1979, from the *Sail the Midnight Sun* series draws on an English poem by Papua New Guinean author John Kasaipwalova that tells the tragic love story of Imdeduya and Yolina, protagonists in oral myth of the Massim people of the Trobriand Islands. In the work, which features earth pigments on wood, we see Imdeduya and Yolina blissfully holding hands at the beginning of a story that ends in quarrel, separation, misfired magic and death, Imdeduya metamorphosing into the sun and Yolina into the moon.[3]

In Joy Hester's *Untitled*, 1949, from her *Love* series, an ethereal female figure presses her lips against a shadowy male presence. Working in Melbourne during the Second World War, Hester adopted ink drawing over painting as her primary medium, often depicting tortured figures, stripped bare with big eyes and tormented expressions. Her *Love* series of 1948–49 was an affirmation of love, connection and sexual union, but there is an uneasiness to the work in the NGV Collection. The female figure wears a look of such sadness, while her male counterpart has the slightest of smirks. His black ink bleeds across and over the female figure's neck as if consuming her with his passion. There is a definite sense of loss, loss of individuality or identity, within this prolonged kiss.



(p. 76) **Joy Hester** *Untitled* 1949, from the *Love* series 1949. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased, 1976
© Joy Hester Estate/Licensed by Copyright Agency, Australia



Fellow Melbourne painter Charles Blackman infuses his 1960 oil work *Lovers* (presented through the NGV Foundation by Dr Joseph Brown AO OBE, Honorary Life Benefactor) with a similar sense of the forlorn. Blackman drew and painted a number of works he titled *Lovers*. In this one, the emphasis is on the dark silhouette of the woman, her partner melting in the background, his hand clutching a bouquet of flowers with bright red centres. The subject of the work is thought to stem not just from the love between the artist and his wife Barbara but also an episode in which Blackman witnessed the infidelity of a woman who lived near his Collins Street studio.[4] Blackman and Barbara would divorce in 1978.

Then there is Tracey Emin's 2007 *Love poem for CF* (purchased with funds donated by Jo Horgan AM and Peter Wetenhall) whose dazzling neon pink words read: 'You put your hand across my mouth but still the noise continues. Every part of my body is screaming, smashed into a thousand million pieces each part for ever belonging to you.' A message of heartbreak, lust and longing, the words of *Love poem for CF* are based on lines of poetry Emin wrote for her former lover in the 1990s. The intimacy of the message, written in her own handwriting, juxtaposes the industrial materiality of the neon as Emin explores her memories and experiences in a frank, poetic and intimate way.

Intimacy too is at the heart of the last work on our abridged journey through love in the NGV Collection. Intimacy and personal experience as told by Dylan Mooney in his *Queer, Blak and Here* series, 2020–21. Mooney is a proud queer Biri (Yuwi), Meriam Mir and Australian South Sea Islander man from Yuwibara/Mackay. The *Queer, Blak and Here* series draws from his life and the lives of other queer Indigenous people in his community, his subjects standing proudly and defiantly, confident in their culture and sexual identities. In *Stuck on you*, 2020, printed 2021 (purchased by the Ruth Margaret Frances Houghton Bequest), two Indigenous men embrace in front of a brilliant moon. They make direct eye contact with the viewer, the bright rainbow pride sleeves and collar and Australian Aboriginal flag patch on one of the boy's jumpers catching the viewer's eye.

Mooney was the youngest artist to be included in the NGV *Queer* exhibition in 2022, with *Stuck on you* featuring alongside more than 400 artworks from antiquity to the present day. Of the exhibition, Mooney said: 'It's helped me be more confident with myself…before [*Queer, Blak and Here*], I would have never had the courage or the confidence to actually create those types of works.'[5]

When many people think of the word 'love', they instinctively imagine the romance of fairytales: passionate, glamorous and uncomplicated. But as we can see in the NGV Collection, the reality may look pretty different. The types of love we feel are as varied as the people with whom we experience it, and the art through which we express it.

Elisa Scarton is NGV Senior Editorial Coordinator.

The NGV warmly thanks donors to the NGV Collection for their generous support.



(left) **Tracey Emin** *Love poem for CF* 2007. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with funds donated by Jo Horgan AM and Peter Wetenhall, 2024 © Tracey Emin. All rights reserved, DACS 2022

(above) **Dylan Mooney** *Stuck on you* 2020, printed 2021 from the *Queer, blak & here* series 2020–21. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Ruth Margaret Frances Houghton Bequest, 2021 © Dylan Mooney



MIRDIDINGKINGATHI JUWARNDA SALLY GABORI

Undulating rhythms of ancestral knowledge are an ever-present force throughout Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori's paintings. Radiating with the vibrant pulse of memory, they form translations of recollection into vast, luminous fields of colour. From Bentinck Island in Queensland, Gabori's paintings evoke a profound sense of revolution, place, history and emotion, blending personal memory with a modern visual language that resonates on a global scale.

Words by **Edwina Green**

At first glance, Sally Gabori's paintings captivate the viewer with their expressive use of colour. Her canvases are filled with broad swathes of electric hues – bold oranges, reds and yellows, rich purples and luminous whites – often layered in seemingly spontaneous, energetic strokes. However, these colours are not merely aesthetic. They each hold significant meaning, representing the land, sea and sky of her ancestral home, Bentinck Island, in Far North Queensland, which continued to hold great significance to Gabori and her descendants regardless of their forced removal by missionaries in the 1940s.[1]

The application of paint is thick and dynamic, creating a sense of movement and fluidity that evokes the ever-changing environment of the island. Her works frequently feature abstract shapes and lines, suggesting topographical features like tidal flows, rock formations or horizons, yet they resist clear figurative interpretation, leaving the viewer to experience the emotional intensity of Country through abstraction.

One of Gabori's iconic paintings, *Dibirdibi Country*, 2007 (a gift of Dr Terry Cutler) exemplifies her ability to convey her connection to her homeland through abstraction. The painting features swelling bands of vivid colour that seem to ripple across the canvas, suggesting the movement of water or shifting sands. The composition is both rhythmic and invigorating, evoking a sense of the elemental forces that shape the landscape of Bentinck Island. This synthesis of land and memory is a hallmark of Gabori's work, in which each painting serves as both a personal expression and a cultural map of her homeland.

Although Gabori's style is distinctly modern, it is deeply rooted in Kaiadilt culture. Born in 1942, she lived a traditional life within her community, before being displaced to Mornington Island in the 1940s. This forced relocation was a result of environmental changes and colonial pressures, and it had a profound impact on her life and work. For decades, Gabori lived in relative obscurity. It was while she was in the founding group of female painters from Mornington Island, alongside Dawn Naranatjil, May Moodoonuthi, Paula Paul, Netta Loogatha, Amy Loogatha and Ethel Thomas, that Gabori began creating art in her late eighties.

Gabori's work is often discussed in the context of Abstraction. However, within the bounds of Abstraction, which are seen as rebellious and idiosyncratic, while also exploring universal themes, we are able to differentiate between Gabori's practice and Western art identifiers. It is essential to understand that her paintings are profoundly personal and culturally significant. The places she painted, such as Mirdidingki, Thundi and Nyinyilki, are all important sites in Kaiadilt cosmology, and her paintings can be seen as acts of reclamation and remembrance. For Gabori, painting was a way to reconnect with her ancestral land after being displaced. Through her art she returned to the places that had been taken from her, reaffirming her identity and the sovereignty of her people over their traditional lands. Despite its seemingly abstract nature, Gabori's art is deeply autobiographical, a visceral response to the land, sea and skies that defined her early life.

Gabori's life and art are a testament to her enduring connection to Bentinck Island. She transformed memories of her homeland into vivid abstract paintings that disrupted conventional Aboriginal art traditions. Reflecting her resilience and innovation, Gabori's work continues to offer a unique visual language that celebrates her roots and transcends geographic boundaries.

Edwina Green is NGV Curator, First Nations.

See Sally Gabori's Artist Room at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia from February. For more information about this free exhibition, visit ngv.melbourne

Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori
Rockcod story place 2006. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Gift of Michael Moon through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2009 © The Estate of Sally Gabori/Licensed by Copyright Agency, Australia

Katsushika Ōi

Hokusai's artist daughter





Katsushika Ōi (illustrator) **Yamamoto, Toryūken** (author) **Yamamotoyama Tea Company** (publisher) *The seeds of a guide to leaf tea (Senchi tebiki no tane)*, 1848. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with funds donated by Dr Pam Martin and Paul Martin, 2024

Katsushika Ōi was the first child born to the great Edo printmaker Katsushika Hokusai's second wife and an accomplished artist in her own right, working alongside her father in his studio until his death. Ōi's *The seeds of a guide to leaf tea (Senchi tebiki no tane)*, 1848, joined the NGV Collection recently through the support of Dr Pam Martin and Paul Martin.

Words by **Adele D'Souza**

Katsushika Ōi is a significant yet overlooked figure in Japanese art from the Edo period (1604–1868). While much of Ōi's life remains shrouded in mystery, her contributions to the *ukiyo-e* tradition, alongside her collaborations with her father, Katsushika Hokusai, are increasingly gaining recognition. A key book shedding light on Ōi's artistic career is *Senchi tebiki no tane (The seeds of a guide to leaf tea)*, 1848, which recently joined the NGV Collection. The tea manual, illustrated by Ōi, provides a rare glimpse into her artistic talent and place within Hokusai's success. As with her art, Ōi's life offers a compelling narrative that navigates the intersections of art, gender and family legacy.

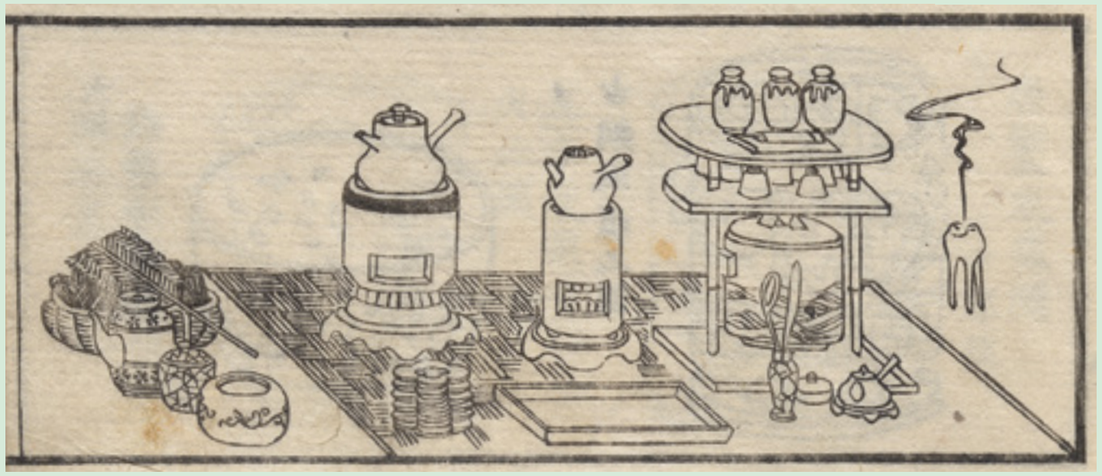
While there are few documents detailing the biographical history of Ōi, Saitō Gesshin, a respected chronicler and historian of the late Edo period, recorded that Ōi was the third daughter of the *ukiyo-e* artist Hokusai. According to Gesshin, Ōi was a 'skilled painter and illustrator' who was born around 1800, died between 1860 and 1870, and participated in a painting exhibition in 1836. As was common during the time, Ōi and her siblings trained in painting from a young age in their father's studio, alongside his students. It was under Hokusai's guidance that Ōi honed her skills as an artist.

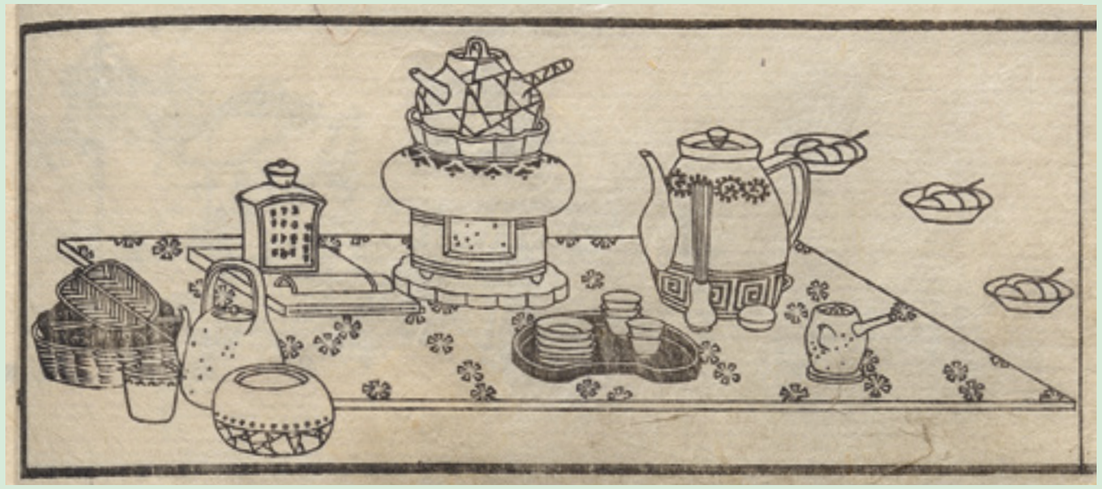
Between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries in Japan and across the world, women were rarely able to pursue careers as professional artists. While Ōi's artistic career would have been constrained in this way, her situation was unique due to Hokusai's already renowned name in Japan and the intimate father-daughter relationship between the two.

In 1824 Ōi married *ukiyo-e* artist Minamizawa Tōmei; however, the couple divorced in 1827. After their separation, Ōi returned to her family home, living there for the last two decades of her father's life. She once again assisted Hokusai in the studio, regularly contributing to his artistic outputs. Ōi is often credited with preparing the sketches and drawings that became the basis for some of her father's prints, and some of Hokusai's most famous paintings were made during the two decades that Ōi was living and working alongside him. However, after her father's death in 1849, the details of Ōi's life became increasingly obscured, with few records detailing her contributions to the family business and Hokusai's legacy. Nineteenth-century historians often downplayed the role of women in the Edo period, a symptom of the societal context in which they were operating. This contributed to the gradual erasure of Ōi from historical records.

Despite Ōi's fifty-year artistic career, only a few works are directly associated with her, including two books and twelve paintings. The work recently acquired by the NGV, *Senchi tebiki no tane*, was written by Toryūken Yamamoto and illustrated by Ōi. The book was commissioned by the Yamamotoyama Tea Company. Established in 1690, Yamamotoyama was one of the leading tea producers during the Edo period, and to this day remains a Japanese privately owned tea company that exports tea globally.

The manual provides a detailed guide to the cultivation, preparation and appreciation of tea leaves, with diagrams and illustrations depicting the production of a new type of tea leaf that was cultivated in the shade, and the





Katsushika Ōi (illustrator) **Yamamoto, Toryūken** (author) **Yamamotoyama Tea Company** (publisher) *The seeds of a guide to leaf tea (Senchi tebiki no tane)*, 1848. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with funds donated by Dr Pam Martin and Paul Martin, 2024

associated tea utensils of Japanese and Chinese origin. Ōi's illustrations reveal her mastery of illustration, showcasing her precision, versatility and technical skill. The subject of the publication is also significant – tea held and continues to hold a significant cultural importance in Japan, revolving around ceremonies and rituals. In this context, Ōi's involvement with the creation of the manual holds special importance. The detailed illustrations of famous tea bowls and braizers, noting their style and the locations they were kept, suggest that Ōi was not merely a studio assistant of Hokusai but also a cultivated connoisseur of the tea ceremony and a highly skilled artist in her own right.

Familial cultural traditions in Japan during the Edo period dictated that children worked to continue their parents' business and legacy. With this in mind, Ōi most likely managed Hokusai's studio, painting and printmaking under her father's signature to complete commissions around the time of his death. Of the hundreds of paintings that Hokusai made, 116 were completed when the artist was in his eighties, perhaps in collaboration with Ōi. Art historians today, such as Professor Julie Nelson Davis, are working to uncover the complexities of the artist's life and work, resulting in a reframing of Hokusai and Ōi's *partnership* in the studio. The father and daughter were accustomed to working long hours together, and over the years they learnt to imitate one another seamlessly, creating cohesive, captivating prints and paintings. Today, Ōi is honoured through modern media, such as in the 2020 novel *The Printmaker's Daughter* by Katherine Govier, the 2015 animated biopic *Miss Hokusai* and the 2017 film *Kurara Hokusai no musume (The Dazzling Life of Hokusai's Daughter)*.

Adele D'Souza is NGV Project Assistant, Publications.

The NGV warmly thanks Dr Pam Martin and Paul Martin for supporting the acquisition of Katsushika Ōi's *The seeds of a guide to leaf tea (Senchi tebiki no tane)*, 1848 for the NGV Collection.

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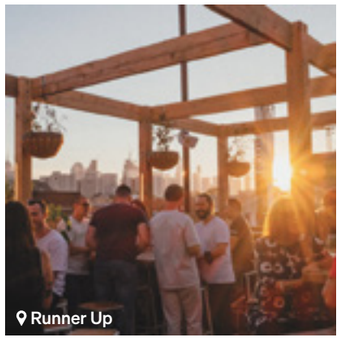
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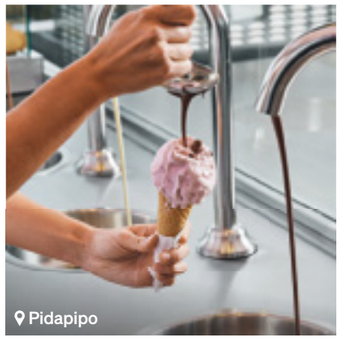


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Cà-rem is the word for ice cream in southern Vietnam and this handcrafted pan-Asian gelato and sorbet will help stave off the summer heat.

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BHUPEN KHAKHAR

Dubbed India's first Pop artist, Bhupen Khakhar was an accountant-turned-artist known for his unique figurative style and incisive observations of class and sexuality. His 1974 painting *Terrace party*, gifted to the NGV through the Felton Bequest in 1979, returns to display on Level 3, NGV International.

Words by **Dr Ted Gott**



Bhupen Khakhar's work has long attracted divided opinions. In 1979, Dr Ursula Hoff, then NGV Curator, said of the painting *Terrace party*, 1974:

> The colours reflect popular Indian paintings; the flat design and graphic subdivision of the canvas in the background landscape convey Khakhar's interest in blending old Indian traditions, such as Rajput paintings, with Sienese thirteenth-century murals and memories of the landscape of his childhood.

In subsequent decades Khakhar was to forge a reputation as one of India's most modern and progressive artists, as his works skyrocketed in value, becoming ever more prized and collectible. However, this did not stop one critic, on the occasion of the Tate Modern in London staging a posthumous retrospective of the artist's work in 2016, from denouncing Khakhar as 'the incredibly unimpressive Indian painter' and an 'old-fashioned, second-rate artist whose paintings are stuck in a timewarp of 1980s neo-figurative cliché'.[2] By contrast, an Indian critic who, like Khakhar, was raised

‘In subsequent decades Khakhar was to forge a reputation as one of India’s most modern and progressive artists’
Dr Ted Gott

in Bombay/Mumbai, praised him in the same newspaper as possibly the ‘greatest and most generous, most seductive pioneer’ of secular modern Indian art, whose ‘besotted and provocative eye for kitsch needs to be placed within the tastes of the 20th-century Gujarati Hindu community, whose achievements were largely, sometimes heroically, mercantile’.[3] Khakhar himself answered criticism of his work with his favourite mantra: ‘Good taste can be very killing.’

Khakhar was born into a Gujarati upper middle-class family in the Khetwadi district of Bombay in 1934. After studying economics and political science at the University of Bombay, he took a second degree in commerce, qualifying as a chartered accountant. He was to work in this profession for the rest of his life, and it certainly helped finance his initial forays into both creative writing and art practice. A largely self-taught artist, in 1962 Khakhar joined the Fine Arts Faculty of Baroda University in the Indian state of Gujarat, where he was to reside from this point on. It has been noted that:

> Being based in Baroda allowed Khakhar social freedoms that would have been impossible in Bombay. In spite of Bombay’s more relaxed social mores compared to those of a traditional town like Baroda, Khakhar enjoyed greater freedom in Baroda because he was away from family pressures in his home city. Khakhar was able to initiate friendships with people from all strata of society, to avoid fulltime work, and to remain unmarried largely because he lived away from Bombay … His artistic liberties included the integration of irony, themes from popular religious and secular visual cultures, and the representation of people and environments not ordinarily depicted in Indian modernist art.[4]

In Baroda (now Vadodara), Khakhar developed a unique style, in which, as he put it, ‘I started using colours from Indian miniatures in my painting, contrasting them with contemporary situations or contemporary people.’[5]

In 1972 Khakhar began a series of *Tradesmen* paintings depicting Indian men engaged in various professions, such as a barber, a tailor or a watch repairer. These works seldom featured female characters, and are best described as homosocial in character, meaning that they examine social interactions between men alone. *Terrace party* belongs to this series, showing ‘three sleezy men whispering together’[6], a congressman, a businessman and a middleman making a deal in a golf club. Khakhar often delighted in inserting self-portraits into his works, and here, the middleman is the artist himself. In the background various aspects of Baroda are depicted with a deliberate naivety that reflects Khakhar’s love of the medieval cityscapes of the Sienese painter Ambrogio Lorenzetti.

As art critic Jyoti Dhar has noted, in India, where gender segregation has long been the norm, ‘same-sex relationships are rarely suspected as being gay’. This was especially so in the 1970s when, ‘for the wider public at this time, unaware of the artist’s sexuality, [Khakhar’s] painting [sat] in a mischievously ambiguous space’.[7] In the 1980s Khakhar became the first modern Indian artist to depict homosexual characters and sexual encounters in his paintings, effectively outing himself as the nation’s first openly gay artist. He had long admired the work of David Hockney, and during his visits to Great Britain in 1976 and 1979, as Dhar puts it, ‘seeing homosexuality flourish and take different shapes within the normalized, community context in England gave him spirit and validation’.[8] Khakhar had first met English artist Howard Hodgkin at the first Triennale-India in 1968, and the two remained lifelong friends. Khakhar’s openness about his own sexuality was to encourage Hodgkin to come to terms with his own homosexuality, something he had long felt uncomfortable with. In 1979 Hodgkin recalled:

> [Khakhar] never said anything about men living with other men, but he did say he was painting an enormous picture with portraits of everybody he’d ever slept with. I was very impressed by that. He asked me, ‘Would you do the same?’ and I said, ‘Well, my picture would be much smaller than yours’. I’d only just begun to accept that I was gay.[9]

Dr Ted Gott is NGV Senior Curator, International Art.

The NGV warmly thanks the Felton Bequest for its gift. See Bhupen Khakhar’s *Terrace party* 1974 on Level 3, NGV International. To view the work online, visit ngv.melbourne/collection. This digital record has been made available on NGV Collection Online through the generous support of Digitisation Champion Ms Carol Grigor through Metal Manufactures Limited.

(pp. 88–89) **Bhupen Khakhar** *Terrace party* 1974. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Felton Bequest, 1979
© Bhupen Khakhar Estate

anne dangar
ethel carrick



CELEBRATE WOMEN ARTISTS



7 DECEMBER 2024 – 27 APRIL 2025

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Ethel Carrick, *The market*, 1919, Moran Family Collection, courtesy of Smith & Singer Fine Art; Anne Dangar, *Plate with cubist design*, 1932–33, National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra, bequest of Michael Fizelle 1985

In the kitchen with

MARTIN BENN

After a decade as chef owner of the internationally acclaimed Sepia in Sydney, Martin Benn brings his avant-garde cuisine with its deep connections to Japan to NGV Garden Restaurant for a very special residency that runs until 16 February.

Interview by **Elisa Scarton**



Chef Martin Benn at Garden Restaurant, NGV International. Photo: Eugene Hyland

ELISA SCARTON **Your menu for the NGV Garden Restaurant references both the traditions of Japanese cuisine and the art of Yayoi Kusama. What are some dishes diners can expect?**

MARTIN BENN There are three dishes on the menu for which I am particularly excited. Pumpkin draws from Kusama's works *Dots Obsession*, 1996/2015, and *Dancing Pumpkin,* 2020, combining them on the plate in an edible form that boasts both colour and flavour.

Then there's tuna, dashi cream, sake, shiso salted plum with a singular disc of shiso and sake jelly suspended over marinated raw tuna, which symbolises simplicity through creativity with no surrounding 'white noise' to distract the diner.

And finally, the Dots Dessert, an idea directly inspired by Kusama herself that features red dots on a white background and white dots on a red background. Whimsical and fun just like the artist, this dish doesn't take itself too seriously!

ES **What is your favourite dish on the NGV Garden Restaurant residency menu?**

MB That would have to be the Infinity Dessert. It took me a long time to refine this dish so that under the restaurant's light it twinkles like one of Kusama's infinity rooms. I made a jelly from the Japanese *kabosu* citrus sprinkled with silver dust. Underneath, an almond sponge is topped with macerated strawberry and a light but rich salted white chocolate.

Another favourite is the Passionfruit Sunshine Dessert, which I based on Kusama's obsession with yellow and black polka dots. Spread across the base of a beautiful scalloped-edged plate sourced exclusively from the Australian homewares brand IN THE ROUNDHOUSE is a rich set dulce de leche cream topped with a fine layer of warm passionfruit and white chocolate *glaçage*, or icing. Visually, all you see is a large circle of bright yellow with black dots. It's a new and interesting way to devour a dessert. Very Kusama!

ES **When and how did you first discover Yayoi Kusama and her work?**

MB I have been fortunate enough to see Kusama's work many times in galleries throughout Japan. The most recent exhibition I saw was at The Broad in Los Angeles and I was blown away by *The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away,* 2013.

Throughout my career, diners often ask why so many of my dishes are shaped in a circle. I think it's because I love the perfect circular shape, and, like in a great deal of Kusama's work, form has always unconsciously been part of my own approach to cooking.

ES **Where have you sourced the ingredients for your residency?**

MB I have access to a few wonderful Melbourne-based Japanese suppliers that I rely on for unique ingredients like the salt pickled sakura, or cherry blossom leaves that I deep fry to a fine crispness, bringing out their amazing floral taste.

One local one ingredient I am always excited about is yuzu. I have worked with Jane and Brian Casey from Mountain Yuzu for more than ten years on the seasonal supply of this bright citrus fruit.

ES **What's it like to be cooking in NGV Garden Restaurant?**

MB I think NGV Garden Restaurant has one of the most beautiful and charming outlooks with a Japanese-ness in itself. It will be an absolute pleasure to cook and serve my food there.

Martin Benn is is a leading Austrailan chef who utilises the best of Australian produce and shares deep connections to Japanese culinary traditions. Elisa Scarton is NGV Senior Editorial Coordinator.

Martin Benn's residency at NGV Garden Restaurant runs until 16 February.

GIPPSLAND
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Australian Children's Book Illustrators of the early 20th Century



7 December 2024 – 23 February 2025

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Free Entry

Ida Rentoul Outhwaite
Dignity and Impudence (detail), c.1910s–1920s
Watercolour, pen and ink and pencil on paper, 47.5 × 37.7cm
Collection National Gallery of Victoria
Gift of Andrée Fay Harkness through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2020
© The estate of the artist

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Melbourne Art Fair
Melbourne Convention &
Exhibition Centre
20 – 23 February 2025

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australiangalleries.com.au

Image: *Ancestral warrens of Burrowing Bettongs in the calcrete rocks, Watikinpirri – Newhaven* (detail) 2023-24 watercolour and etching on Gampi and cotton rag paper 112 × 201 cm
Photography: Ian Hill

JOHN WOLSELEY

NGURRA - Dwelling of desert animals - mounds, burrows, warrens, lairs and nests

20 – 23 February 2025

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Image: Annika Romeyn, 'Endurance 9', 2021, watercolour monotype on paper, 250 x 190 cm, image courtesy of the artist and Flinders Lane Gallery.

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Image: ©The Johnston Collection, 2024

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Exhibition developed by Natural History Museum London

© Ingo Arndt

Wildlife Photographer of the Year

20 Dec 2024 – 18 May 2025

National Wool Museum
Wadawurrung Country
26 Moorabool St, Geelong
Entry with admission
nwm.vic.gov.au

national wool museum | CITY OF GREATER GEELONG

In collaboration with Yayoi Kusama Studio, a colourful and joyful capsule collection launches this summer at NGV, exclusive to NGV design store

TOTE BAGS
$34.95

Cotton tote bags are adorned with artworks from the *Yayoi Kusama* exhibition. Featuring embroidered and silver foil details, each bag has an interior pocked and external d-link ring for keyrings.

PINK AND BLACK POLKA DOT POUCHES
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Available in small and large sizes, *Yayoi Kusama* lined pouches are perfect for carrying life's necessities.

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Silk satin scarves featuring the paintings *I Love-Eyes*, 2013, and *Pumpkin*, 1991, come housed in a custom box with premium tissue paper.

JIGSAW PUZZLES
$39.95 – $44.95

Try your hand at a 750-piece jigsaw in the shape of an iconic Kusama pumpkin, or a 1000-piece jigsaw with imagery of a painting and an infinity room.

MAGNETS
$8.95 - $19.95

Everyone needs an extra magnet or two – try an oversized magnet in the shape of a pumpkin, or rectangular magnets featuring three infinity rooms from the exhibition.

TEA TOWELS
$34.95

These linen cotton-blend tea towels are adorned with three Kusama paintings with the artist's signature detail and hanging loop for kitchen use.

3D NOTEBOOKS
$29.95

These fabric-bound notebooks with coloured metallic gilded pages featuring 3D images of infinity rooms from the exhibition.

WATER BOTTLES
$44.95 - $54.95

Sip from a vacuum-insulated, BPA-free water bottle, available in two sizes (350ml and 500ml) with bubbled lids. Suitable for hot and cold liquids.

SOCKS
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Perfect for gifting, these adult woven jacquard-weave socks come adorned with yellow pumpkin artwork and pink and black NGV Waterwall design.

POSTER
$19.95

Take home an exhibition poster featuring the infinity room *The Hope of the Polka Dots Buried in Infinity Will Eternally Cover the Universe*, 2019.

Available instore and online at NGV design store via NGV. Melbourne/store

Members receive a 10 per cent discount when shopping at NGV design store and when dining at NGV. Members also benefit from discounted tickets to exhibitions, programs and courses. Premium Members receive a 15 per cent discount. Scan to join NGV Members and enjoy these discounts and more.

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Closing Soon

REKOSPECTIVE: The Art of Reko Rennie

Until 27 January



Installation view from *REKOSPECTIVE: The Art of Reko Rennie* on display at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia to 27 Jan 2025. Photo: Kate Shanasy

REKOSPECTIVE charts the bold and dynamic practice of Kamilaroi artist Reko Rennie. The exhibition resists a conventional chronological sequence, allowing audiences to freely navigate the intersection between culture, politics and identity from a contemporary First Nations perspective.

On display at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, *REKOSPECTIVE* showcases Rennie's unique style and offers an important perspective on dialogues surrounding cultural and social visibility.

For more information about this free exhibition, scan the code.

In the Next Issue

NGV Magazine Mar–Apr



Martin Grant, Paris (fashion house) **Martin Grant** (designer) *Camel coat*, from the fall 2005 ready-to-wear collection.Collection of Martin Grant, Paris. Photo: Polly Borland. Model: Jade Parfitt

In the next issue of *NGV Magazine*, we dive into the magnificent world of one of Australia's leading fashion figures, Martin Grant, whose clients have included Cate Blanchett, Lee Radziwill, Naomi Campbell, Juliette Binoche and Lady Gaga. This exciting *NGV Magazine* feature coincides with a major exhibition staged at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia from 28 March, exploring more than four decades of Grant's career through fashion, photography, sketches and more.

We'll also mark the 100th anniversary of the Art Deco movement and highlight new works and stories from the NGV Collection.

People

Events celebrating artists, community and culture at NGV this summer.



Artist Reko Rennie and Sophie Prince, Curatorial Project Officer, Australian and First Nations Art, and co-curator of *Rekospective* at the 2024 NGV First Nations Art Dinner. Photo: Carmen Zammit



D'Lan Davidson and Rachal Jacobs with *Wurrandan Marawili, Yathikpa – the fire in the sea* 2023 at the 2024 NGV First Nations Art Dinner. Photo: Carmen Zammit



Professor Julie Andrews OAM, Academic Director of Indigenous Research, La Trobe University; Professor Gaye Sculthorpe, NGV Trustee and Research Professor, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University; NGV Deputy Director Andrew Clark; and Don Heron, NGV Assistant Director, Exhibitions Management and Design at the 2024 NGV First Nations Art Dinner. Photo: Carmen Zammit



John Tuck, Barbara Hay and Kate Hay at the 2024 NGV First Nations Art Dinner. Photo: Carmen Zammit



Tony Ellwood AM, NGV Director, Dr Sarah Tiffin, Emily Hardy and Beatrice Moignard at the 2024 NGV First Nations Art Dinner. Photo: Carmen Zammit



Exhibition curators Laurie Benson and Imogen Mallia-Valijan at the opening of *Cats & Dogs* at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia Photo: Jessie Obialor



Jo Horgan AM, MECCA Co-Founder with Dutch designer Christien Miendertsma, recipient of the 2024 MECCA X NGV Women in Design Commission. Photo: Sarah Forgie



Leila Gurruwiwi and Mandi Barton at the 2024 NGV First Nations Art Dinner. Photo: Carmen Zammit



Dr Ted Gott, NGV Senior Curator, International Art, and Julia Busuttil Nishimura at NGV International for *An Evening with Julia Busuttil Nishimura*. Photo: Michael Pham



Larissa Behrendt, author, filmmaker, lawyer and host of ABC Radio's Speaking Out, and artist Vernon Ah Kee at the 2024 Wurrdha Marra Conversation. Photo: Martin Wurt



SBS Radio host Preeti Jabal moderates a panel discussion with Melbourne designers Abha Gupta and Kudrat Makkar at NGV International for Indian Community Day 2024. Photo: Eugene Hyland



SONYA YONCHEVA

She is renowned for her courage. She is unafraid to take risks, even when asked to debut some of opera's iconic roles at the last minute. With her thrilling voice, the Bulgarian soprano is one of the most exciting performers of her generation. Now a fixture at leading opera houses, she focuses on reinventing herself. **As the fearless artist she is.**

#Perpetual



OYSTER PERPETUAL DAY-DATE 36

ROLEX

What's On



Amos Gebhardt *Alexis with Moon* 2024. Courtesy of the artist and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne

WEAVING MATTER: MATERIAL EXPERIMENTATION
Until 16 February 2025
VENUE Ararat Gallery TAMA, Ararat

Curated by Liz Williamson (1949–2024), this exhibition showcases contemporary practitioners who are experimenting with diverse materials to translate political, social, personal or environmental concerns into weavings. The artists have created innovative woven works that comment on current concerns and present contemporary stories in cloth, and features Christine Appleby, Hannah Cooper, Blake Griffiths, Amanda Ho, Lise Hobcroft, Kelly Leonard, Jennifer Robertson, Jacqueline Stojanović, Jane Théau, Ilka White and Monique van Nieuwland.

araratgallerytama.com.au

MEDIEVAL TO METAL: THE ART & EVOLUTION OF THE GUITAR
Until 2 February 2025
VENUE Art Gallery of Ballarat, Ballarat

For those who rock, we salute you! *Medieval to Metal: The Art & Evolution of the Guitar* is exclusive to the Art Gallery of Ballarat and features forty iconic guitars on loan from the National Guitar Museum (USA) alongside photographs, paintings and objects.

The collection of classical to contemporary works tracks the history of the world's most popular instrument from its medieval beginnings through to the guitar's pivotal role in rock 'n' roll. See rare guitars and artefacts in this epic exhibition narrating the history, evolution and design of the guitar covering all music genres and uses.

artgalleryofballarat.com.au

AMOS GEBHARDT | MÅNGATA
Until 16 February
VENUE Venue Museum of Australian Photography (MAPh), Wheelers Hill

Drawing on the moon as a symbol of illumination, Amos Gebhardt's *Mångata* weaves sound and moving image with photographic portraits lit by moonlight. *Mångata* is a Swedish term describing a pathway towards the horizon created by the moon's reflection on water – a metaphorical road into the unknown. Interlinked with lunar studies, the series features subjects regarded as visionaries in their fields.

Participants include Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Alexis Wright, Anjali Sharma, Aseel Tayah, Debbie Kilroy, Leah Avene and Nevo Zisin. Reflected in their eyes are tracings of the moon created through the subtle movement of the human body in dialogue with Earth's rotation.

maph.org.au

ARA DOLATIAN | AT THE FIRST FLOOD OF DAYLIGHT
Until 22 February 2025
VENUE Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, Bundoora

Ceramic artist Ara Dolatian (born in Iran, based in Melbourne) examines the ancient *Epic of Gilgamesh*, responding to queer and feminist interpretations of the epic and asserting sexual difference and gender multiplicity as pathways to finding deeper human connections.

arts.darebin.vic.gov.au/bundoorahomestead

SEE NGV WORKS IN THESE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SHOWS

65,000 YEARS: A SHORT HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN ART
Opens 14 February
VENUE The Ian Potter Museum of Art, The University of Melbourne

65,000 Years: A Short History of Australian Art stares into the dark heart of Australia's art history and is curated by Professor Marcia Langton AO, Associate Provost, Ms Judith Ryan AM and Ms Shanysa McConville in consultation with Indigenous custodians.

The exhibition examines the rise to prominence of Indigenous art in Australia and the importance of Indigenous cultural and design traditions, knowledge and agency. Seven major new artistic commissions by leading contemporary First Nations artists have also been unveiled as part of the exhibition.

art-museum.unimelb.edu.au

ANNE DANGAR
Until 27 April 2025
VENUE National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Anne Dangar occupies a unique position in art history as one of Australia's most important yet underacknowledged modern artists. Dangar is one of very few Australian artists to form part of the European avant-garde in the twentieth century, and the only to meaningfully contribute to Cubism in France, her adopted home. Bringing together ceramics, paintings, works on paper and archival material, this exhibition will explore Dangar's life and practice, as well as her important position in French modern art as one of most dedicated and truly modern Australian artists of the twentieth century.

nga.gov.au

POP FOREVER, TOM WESSELMANN &...
Until 24th February 2025
VENUE Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris

An exhibition dedicated to Pop Art, one of the major artistic movements of the 1960s whose influence continues to be felt across all continents and among all generations. The exhibition is centred around TomWesselmann – one of the leading figures of the movement – through a selection of 150 paintings and works in various materials.
The exhibition also features seventy works by thirty-five artists of different generations and nationalities who share a common sensibility for 'Pop' – from its Dadaist roots to its contemporary manifestations, from the 1920s to the present day.

fondationlouisvuitton.fr/en

LEIGH BOWERY!
Opens 27 February
VENUE Tate Modern, London

Leigh Bowery's short but extraordinary life left a distinct, undeniable mark on the art world and beyond.

An artist, performer, model, TV personality, club promoter, fashion designer and musician, Bowery took on many different roles, all the while refusing to be limited by convention. This eclectic and immersive exhibition is a rare chance to experience many of Bowery's 'Looks' alongside his collaborations with artists including Michael Clark, Charles Atlas, Nick Knight, Fergus Greer, Stephen Willats, Nicola Rainbird, Mr Pearl and Lucian Freud.

tate.org.uk

SHEILA HICKS
Until 23 February
VENUE Kunsthalle Düsseldorf and Josef Alberts Museum Quadrat Bottrop, Germany

The Josef Albers Museum Quadrat Bottrop and the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf will present the first major solo exhibition of the American artist Sheila Hicks, whose towering *Nowhere to go* 2022, featured in the NGV Triennial of 2023–24 and is part of the NGV Collection through the support of the NGVWA. Comprising over 250 works from all creative periods, the collaborative exhibition provides a comprehensive overview of the ninety-year-old artist's multifaceted career for the first time in Germany.

kunsthalle-duesseldorf.de

With thanks to the Public Galleries Association of Victoria (PGAV).
Visit pgav.org.au for more exhibitions.

List of reproduced works and end notes

(cover)
Yayoi Kusama © YAYOI KUSAMA

p. 4 (top)
Yayoi Kusama
Dancing Pumpkin 2020
bronze, urethane paint
National Gallery of Victoria Loti
and Victor Smorgon Fund, 2024
© YAYOI KUSAMA

p. 4 (bottom)
Bhupen Khakhar
Terrace party 1974
oil on canvas
113.4 × 108.3 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1979
EA7-1979
© Bhupen Khakhar Estate

p. 20
Robert Mathieu (designer)
R. Mathieu Luminaires Rationnels, Paris (manufacturer)
Pendant light c. 1954
lacquered metal, steel, lighting components
83.0 × 110.0 cm diameter
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, NGV Supporters of Contemporary Design and Architecture, NGV Supporters of Decorative Arts, NGV Foundation Patrons, 2019
2019.209
© Robert Mathieu

p. 21
Charles Eames (designer)
Ray Eames (designer)
Herman Miller, Michigan (manufacturer)
Storage unit, model ESU-400 designed 1949–50, manufactured 1952–55
Birch (Betula sp.) veneered plywood, zinc-plated steel, chrome-plated steel, steel, synthetic polymer paint on composition board, fibreglass, rubber
147.0 × 120.2 × 43.4 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased NGV Foundation with the assistance of NGV Supporters of Decorative Arts, 2022
2022.12

p. 25
Isamu Noguchi (designer)
Ozeki & Co., Gifu (manufacturer)
Akari, floor light, model BB3-33S c. 1952
Japanese paper, bamboo, plywood, cast iron, wood, silk thread, lacquer, steel, (other materials), electrical components
172.3 × 80.1 × 25.5 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, NGV Supporters of Decorative Arts, 2023
2023.244
© Isamu Noguchi / Licensed by Copyright Agency, Australia

pp. 28–29
Joan Mitchell
Marge 1990
oil on canvas
195.0 × 227.8 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Loti Smorgon AO through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2011
2011.21
© Estate of Joan Mitchell

pp. 34–35
Yayoi Kusama
Flower Obsession 2016–17
flower decals, fabric flowers, furniture, found objects
330.0 × 1890.0 × 1480.0 cm (variable) (installation)
ed. 1/3
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, NGV Women's Association, 2018
2017.1244.1
© Yayoi Kusama, courtesy Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo

p. 36
Yayoi Kusama
Pollen 1986
sewn stuffed fabric, synthetic fibre, synthetic polymer paint,metal
170.0 × 88.0 × 88.0 cm
© YAYOI KUSAMA

p. 40
Yayoi Kusama
Avantgarde Fashion N 1968/1998
paint on cotton
Iwami Art Museum
© YAYOI KUSAMA

p. 44
Yayoi Kusama
Infinity Mirrored Room—My Heart is Filled to the Brim with Sparkling Light 2024
wood, metal, mirror, tile, acrylic panel, rubber, lighting element, stainless steel dimensions variable
Collection of the artist
© YAYOI KUSAMA

p. 50
Yayoi Kusama
Dancing Pumpkin 2020
bronze, urethane paint
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Loti and Victor Smorgon Fund, 2024
© YAYOI KUSAMA

p. 52
Yayoi Kusama
The Obliteration Room 2002–
furniture, paint, stickers
dimensions variable
Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art
Collaboration between Yayoi Kusama and Queensland Art Gallery
Commissioned Queensland Art Gallery
Gift of the artist through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation, 2012
2012.098
© YAYOI KUSAMA

p. 54 (above)
Richard Bell
Land Rights/Back 2024
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased with funds donated by Christopher Thomas AM and Cheryl Thomas, 2024
© Richard Bell, courtesy Milani Gallery

(below)
John Prince Siddon
Took our children away 2024
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased by Linda Herd and Canny Quine Foundation, 2024
© John Prince Siddon

p. 55 (above)
Louise Malarvie
Paraku (Lake Gregory) 2024
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.
Purchased with funds donated by Barbara Hay and the Hay family.

(below)
Mitch Mahoney
Kampitya (Father), Red gum canoe 2024
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family and Chris Thomas AM and Cheryl Thomas, 2024
© Mitch Mahoney

pp. 56–59
Frank Lloyd Wright (designer)
Ernst Wasmuth, Berlin (publisher)
Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright (Wasmuth Portfolio, Volumes I and 2) 1910–11
lithograph
47.0 × 67.0 cm (each volume)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2024

p. 63
Gemma Smith
Bask 2023
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
230.0 × 200.0 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2024
© Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Meanjin/Brisbane

p. 65
William Blake
Los, Enitharmon and Orc c. 1795
plate 21 from *The First Book of Urizen*, 1794, re-issued as part of *The Large Book of Designs*, copy B
colour relief etching printed in opaque pigments, and finished with watercolour and pen and ink
16.6 × 10.2 cm (image and plate) 25.4 × 18.5 cm (border) 31.4 × 25.1 cm (sheet)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1920
1027-3

p. 66
William Blake
Satan smiting Job with Boils 1823–26
plate 6 from *Illustrations of The Book of Job*, published 1826
engraving on chine collé
20.0 × 15.2 cm (image) 21.9 × 17.2 cm (plate) 38.9 × 25.9 cm (sheet)
one of 150 sets on Whatman Turkey Mill paper (from the first edition of 215 marked 'Proof')
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1920
1058.7-3

p. 67
William Blake
Job and his Wife restored to Prosperity 1823–26
plate 21 from *Illustrations of The Book of Job*, published 1826
engraving on chine collé
19.6 × 14.8 cm (image) 21.7 × 17.0 cm (plate) 39.9 × 26.5 cm (sheet)
one of 150 sets on Whatman Turkey Mill paper (from the first edition of 215 marked 'Proof')
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1920
1058.22-3

p. 69
William Blake
Dante at the Moment of entering the Fire 1824–1827
illustration for *The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri (Purgatorio XXVII, 46-48)*
pen and ink and watercolour over black chalk and pencil, with sponging and touches of gum
52.6 × 36.8 cm (sheet)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1920
1018-3

p. 70
William Blake
William Blake Dante running from the Three Beasts (1824–1827)
illustration for *The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri (Inferno I, 1–90)*.
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.
Felton Bequest, 1920
988-3

p. 72
Richard Avedon
Renée, The new look of Dior, Place de la Concorde, Paris, August 1947 1978
gelatin silver photograph
(45.7 × 36.5 cm)
ed. 31/75
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2024
© The Estate of Richard Avedon

p. 74
Robert Indiana
Love 1965
colour screenprint on card
15.2 × 15.2 cm (folded)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Daniel Thomas, 2009
2009.153
© Robert Indiana/ARS, New York. Licensed by Copyright Agency, Australia

p. 76
Donato Barcaglia
Love is blind (Amore accieca) c. 1875
marble
168.6 × 70.0 × 58.0 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Carol Sisson through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2020
2020.519

p. 77
Joy Hester
Untitled 1949
from the *Love* series 1949
brush and ink and mauve pastel
31.6 × 25.2 cm (image and sheet)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1976
P126-1976
© Joy Hester Estate/Licensed by Copyright Agency, Australia

p. 78
Tracey Emin
Love poem for CF 2007
neon
420.2 × 303.6 × 6.6 cm (installation)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased with funds donated by Jo Horgan AM and Peter Wetenhall, 2024
2024.126
© Tracey Emin. All rights reserved, DACS 2022

p. 79
Dylan Mooney
Stuck on you 2020, printed 2021
from the *Queer, blak & here* series 2020–21
inkjet print
(118.9 × 84.1 cm)
ed. 1/5
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Ruth Margaret Frances Houghton Bequest, 2021
2021.603.7
© Dylan Mooney

p. 82
Mirdidingkingathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori
Rockcod story place 2006
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
104.2 × 76.7 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Michael Moon through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2009
© The Estate of Sally Gabori/Licensed by Copyright Agency, Australia

pp. 83–84 (top and bottom)
Katsushika Ōi (illustrator)
Yamamoto, Toryūken (author)
Yamamotoyama tea company (publisher)
The seeds of a guide to leaf tea (Senchi tebiki no tane) 1848
ink on paper, book
7.3 × 16.4 × 1.2 cm
Purchased with funds donated by Dr Pam Martin and Paul Martin, 2024

p. 88
Bhupen Khakhar
Terrace party 1974
oil on canvas
113.4 × 108.3 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1979
© Bhupen Khakhar Estate

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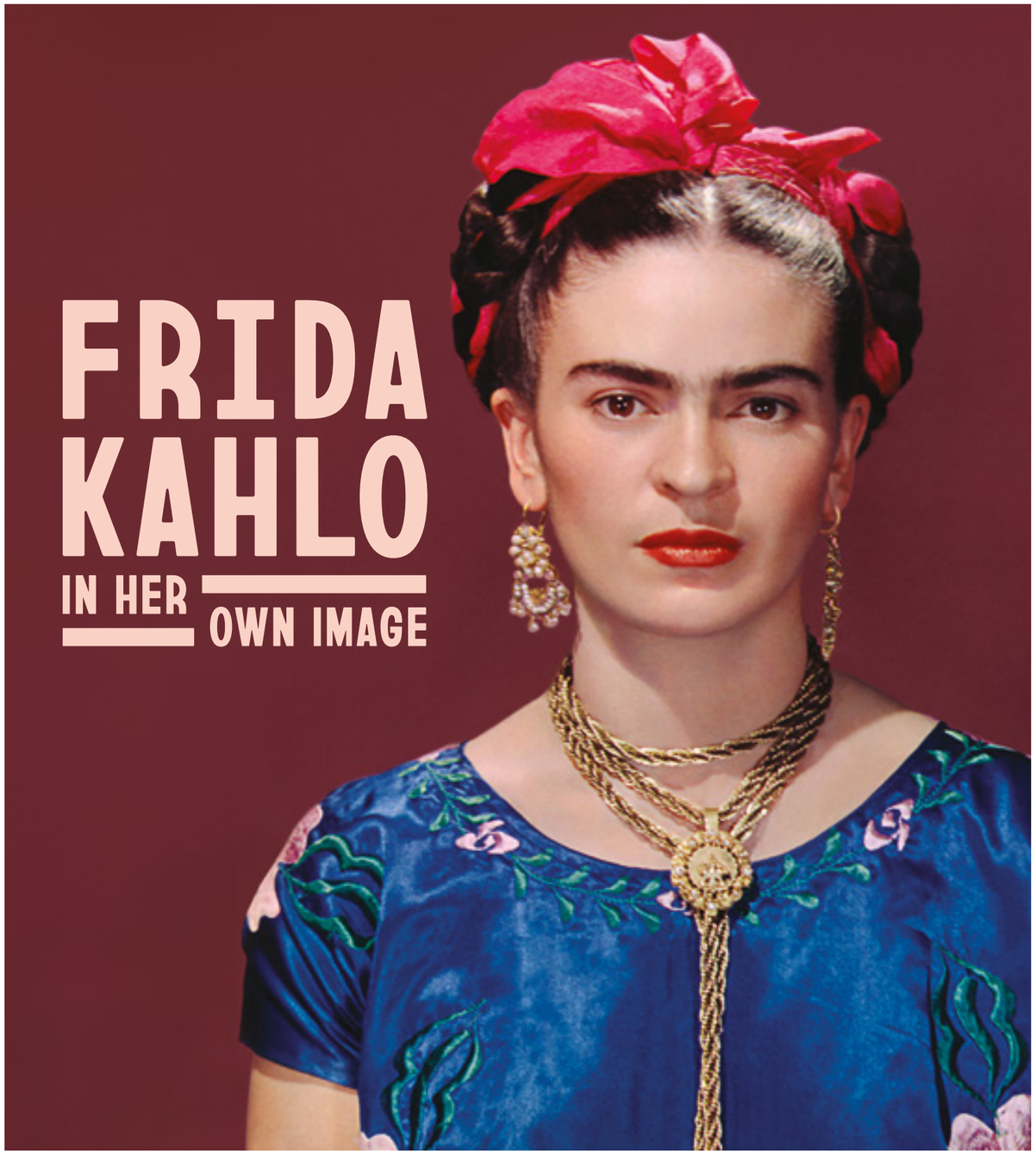
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