



## MEDIA RELEASE

### NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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## Women Photographers 1900–1975: A Legacy of Light

NGV International, St Kilda Road | 28 November 2025 – 3 May 2026 | Ticketed



**23 September 2025:** Featuring some of the most iconic images from the twentieth century by the likes of **Diane Arbus, Dora Maar, Lee Miller, Dorothea Lange, Olive Cotton** and many more, *Women Photographers 1900–1975: A Legacy of Light* celebrates the images, lives and stories of more than 70 influential artists working between 1900 to 1975. Opening 28 November 2025 at NGV International, the exhibition features more than 300 rare and innovative photographs, prints, postcards, photobooks and magazines from the NGV Collection – with 170+ recently acquired and 130+ on display for the very first time.

Featuring portraiture, photojournalism, landscape photography, fashion photography, experimental avant-garde imagery and more, *Women Photographers 1900–1975: A Legacy of Light* explores the work of the artists against the backdrop of significant social, political and cultural events – from Melbourne to Tokyo, Paris to Buenos Aires. From historic images of the suffrage movement at the turn of the twentieth century, through to the women's liberation movement and beyond, the exhibition reveals how these artists have used key photographic styles to capture, reflect and challenge the world around them. This exhibition highlights the rich networks of exchange of information, ideas and support between many of these women across the world.

The exhibition showcases the work of prominent and leading figures of photography, as well as drawing attention to lesser-known artists. Featured artists include **Berenice Abbott, Lola Álvarez Bravo, Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, Imogen Cunningham, Mikki Ferrill, Sue Ford, Christine Godden, Ponch Hawkes, Annemarie Heinrich, Ruth Hollick, Florence Henri, Kati Horna, Germaine Krull, Tina Modotti, Lucia Moholy, Tokiwa Toyoko, Francesca Woodman, Yamazawa Eiko**, among many others.

The exhibition reflects a recent strategic collecting focus on celebrating the contributions of women artists of the early twentieth century in the NGV Photography collection. Many of the new works on display – including by artists previously unrepresented in the NGV Collection – have been acquired with the generous support of the Bowness Family Foundation, who have been involved with the NGV for almost 25 years and who also generously contributed to the publication. There have also been significant works joining the NGV Collection with the generous support of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family, as well as Professor Wang Gungwu, and Joy Anderson.

Highlight works include an outstanding selection of photographs by **Dora Maar**, including fashion photographs, social documentary images and portraiture. Dora Maar was a sophisticated artist and image-maker and deeply connected within the avant-garde community. In 1935–36, she created these studio images of Pablo Picasso, with whom she was romantically involved. In these portraits, on display in the exhibition, Maar turns the gaze of her camera onto Picasso, offering the viewer a candid insight into their private domestic lives.

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A further highlight is **Dorothea Lange**'s instantly recognisable work, *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California*, 1936, commissioned as part of a campaign by the US government Farm Security Administration to bring recognition to the impacts of the Great Depression on working class families. Lange created several photographs of the woman, Florence Owens Thompson, and her children. This image, focussed on Thompson's seemingly anxious face, became a poignant symbol of the times.

In the 1930s German-born **Ilse Bing** became known as the 'Queen of Leica' for her use of the small, hand-held camera which allowed her the flexibility to shoot from dizzying angles, create contrasts of light, shade and shadows, and dynamic perspectives. The exhibition will feature Bing's iconic modernist image, *Self-portrait* 1931, showing the artist's reflection, of herself and her camera, accompanied by her side profile in another angled mirror demonstrating the significance of the camera in her image-making.

Inner-city Melbourne of the 1970s is brought to life in the photographs of **Ponch Hawkes**, offering audiences a first-hand glimpse into the changing social dynamics and sense of activism of the period. Photographs on display include her documentation of life in communal houses, of urban graffiti calling for childcare and social housing, of celebrations for Gay Pride Week, and documentation of the Women's Theatre Group, performing outdoors beneath a Women's Liberation banner.

Also on display is **Olive Cotton**'s iconic *Teacup ballet*, 1935, a wonderful study of light, shadows and forms. Cotton had purchased an inexpensive set of cups and saucers to replace the mugs in the Sydney studio of photographer Max Dupain, where she was studio assistant. Realising their potential for a dynamic arrangement, she photographed the teacups with elongated shadows, creating a striking composition of shadow play that Cotton described as "ballet-like".

American artist **Lee Miller** moved to Paris in 1929, where she became Man Ray's photographic student, then colleague, model and lover – all the while creating her own extraordinary photographs. On display in the exhibition is Miller's portrait of Man Ray, taken in 1931 in Miller's Paris apartment depicting her subject framed tightly, his gaze diverted.

Lucy Schwob and Suzanne Malherbe, better known by their adopted alliterative pseudonyms **Claude Cahun** and **Marcel Moore**, were an artist duo who radically questioned the constraints of gender in their artwork and lives. The pair are represented in this exhibition with the artist's book *Aveux non Avenus*, 1930. In this highly experimental book, featuring 'essay-poems' and collaborative photomontages, which feature self-portraits of Cahun with a shaved head and androgynous appearance and dress, Cahun and Moore raise powerful questions about identity, sexuality and self-expression.

*Las Lavanderas (The Washerwomen)* c.1940, also on display, is one of several photographs created by Mexican artist **Lolo Álvarez Bravo** of women washing their clothes at a waterfront. The sun casts long shadows from a nearby structure, transforming the scene of everyday labour into one of dynamic angles and forms. Bravo is known for her passionate documentation of the peoples and cultures of Mexico, through such dynamic and vivid compositions.

**Parliamentary Secretary for Creative Industries, Katie Hall, said:** 'This exhibition will celebrate the work of women photographers who documented the world around them from vastly different places and perspectives. The NGV continues to present exhibitions that show us life through different lenses and introduce us to creative trailblazers from around the world.'

**Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV, said:** 'Like all collecting institutions globally, the NGV has been actively looking at historically underrepresented areas of our collection, including gender. Though this is a long and ongoing process, this exhibition offers an opportunity to celebrate and share the more than 300 works by women photographers, many of which we've collected since 2020. We hope this exhibition gives audiences the chance to discover the work of lesser-known photographers or deepen their appreciation of familiar ones.'

**Professor Simon Tormey, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin, said:** 'This important exhibition foregrounds the often-overlooked contributions of women to the evolution of photography across the twentieth century. At Deakin, where we teach and research across Creative Arts and Photography, we are proud to support initiatives that celebrate artistic innovation and also challenge historical silences. This collaboration with the NGV exemplifies our commitment to the transformative power of the arts.'

The exhibition will be accompanied by a beautifully illustrated publication exploring the images, lives and stories of women photographers from the pivotal period of 1900–1975. The publication will feature new essays from NGV Curators and international contributors including leading American art historian, critic and curator Abigail Solomon-Godeau; Emeritus Professor at the ANU School of Art & Design Helen Ennis; World Press Photo lead curator Amanda Maddox; photographer and writer Carla Williams, and Tokyo Photographic Art Museum curator Yamada Yuri. *Women Photographers 1900–1975* will be co-published with Hatje Cantz in Berlin.

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This exhibition coincides with the fifty-year anniversary of the first International Women's Year in 1975, as declared by the United Nations.

*Women Photographers 1900–1975: A Legacy of Light* will be on display from 28 November 2025 – 3 May 2026 at NGV International, St Kilda Road, Melbourne. Entry fees apply. Tickets and information are available via the NGV website: [NGV.MELBOURNE](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au)

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**IMAGES:** <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/pleelk19wexb0lfxggr78/AlabK9f-BkrRpXFy3cMhUew?rlkey=g5sz5sh9ue2lcuflqs7psvsqy&st=sy9isq9d&dl=0>

**IMAGE CAPTION:** Dorothea Lange, *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California* 1936; Olive Cotton, *Teacup ballet* 1935; Barbara Morgan *Martha Graham: Letter to the world* 1940

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