



MEDIA RELEASE

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Where are they now? - NGV searches for Margaret Preston artworks for new retrospective exhibition in 2026

Monday 22 December: The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) is seeking public assistance to locate four paintings by one of Australia's most celebrated artists, Margaret Preston (1875 – 1963), last seen for sale at auction or in private collections. If located, the NGV intends to feature the paintings in a new retrospective exhibition on Margaret Preston's work at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia in 2026 – the first on the artist in more than two decades.

The art of Margaret Preston has shaped Australia's cultural and aesthetic landscape. A central figure in the story of modern art in Australia, Preston is best known for her paintings and woodblock prints of native flora and landscapes. Preston's work continues to inspire and generate debate, emphasising the important contribution she has made to Australian art and culture.

The NGV's new retrospective exhibition will feature nearly 250 of Margaret Preston's most iconic works, including *Flannel flowers* 1938 and *Shoalhaven Gorge, New South Wales* 1940-41, alongside key loans from the National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales and Art Gallery of South Australia. The NGV's exhibition will chart Preston's career and contextualise her work alongside peers and in direct conversation with contemporary First Nations artists who have responded to her use of Indigenous iconography.

Following a two-year search across Australian and international galleries, collections and auction houses, the NGV is asking for public assistance to locate the following known works by Preston:



Still life: lobsters 1901
oil on canvas
76.2 x 110.2 cm

A truly exceptional painting, *Still life: lobsters* is one of Margaret Preston's only surviving early career works. One of her largest paintings, the work was completed in Adelaide when she was 26 years old. *Still life: lobsters* was last known to be held in an Adelaide private collection.



Still life with mandarins c. 1908
oil on canvas
56 x 46 cm

Still life with mandarins provides a glimpse into Margaret Preston's life when she was residing with artist Bessie Davidson's family in Adelaide. With Preston's chosen domestic items beautifully recorded, *Still life mandarins* demonstrates the techniques and skills she acquired while studying in Paris at the turn of the century. The work last appeared at auction in 2006.



Still life 1915
oil on cardboard
45.5 x 55.5 cm

This sophisticated composition was completed in Bonmahon, Ireland in 1915 during Preston's second trip abroad and was exhibited at the New English Art Club the same year. *Still life* is a key work from her time overseas, demonstrating Preston's growing interest in Post-Impressionism as well as the influence of Japanese ukiyo-e woodcut artists on her work. Available records indicated that this work last sold at auction in 1995.



Gloxinia 1928
oil on canvas
45.5 x 35.5 cm

Gloxinia 1928 sits amongst Margaret Preston's distinctly modernist period of the late 1920s. This commanding still-life showcases Preston's use of angles and light, while foregrounding her embrace of the landscape through depictions of Mosman Bay. The location of *Gloxinia* was unknown during the Art Gallery of New South Wales retrospective in 2005, however, it came up at auction in 2014.

Director of the NGV, Tony Ellwood AM, said: 'The work of Margaret Preston truly captures an Australian artistic sensibility that continues to resonate today. We hope the Australian public can help us locate these important works from the early twentieth century, and help us to more comprehensibly showcase her contribution to Australian art history.'

'The NGV's retrospective of Preston's work will be unlike any other exhibition on this artist. Our intention is to celebrate her rich cultural legacy, while also presenting new perspectives on the complexities of using visual vocabularies from Indigenous cultures. By putting her in conversation with contemporary artists, we hope to contextualise her work for twenty-first century audiences and open new avenues for engaging with Preston's extraordinary oeuvre,' said Ellwood.

The *Margaret Preston* exhibition will be on display at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia from 4 September 2026 - 31 January 2027. Admission fees apply. Information and tickets are available via the NGV website: [NGV.MELBOURNE](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au)

ABOUT MARGARET PRESTON

Born in Adelaide in 1875, Preston (nee McPherson) studied in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne, before travelling extensively across the UK and Europe. Participating in the growing discourses surrounding modernism, Preston began to merge a variety of influences, such as Post-Impressionism, modern European art, the Arts and Craft movement, and Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints.

Following Preston's return from Europe to Sydney in 1919, she established herself as a central figure in the dissemination of modernist principles and pursued the development of a visual language that was uniquely Australian. Preston championed experimental modes of art making through her use of different materials and subject matter. The evolution of Preston's art reflected her diverse travels across the globe, culminating in her pursuit of a distinctly Australian art, independent from European art centres, and her appropriation of First Nations design iconographies, which has been widely discussed in contemporary scholarship.

If you have any information regarding the whereabouts of the above Margaret Preston artworks, please contact preston@ngv.vic.gov.au.

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Images:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/s4xsnr3udy95o9aaiakw6/AFFZDVqVklOLu3dHJe8JcCl?rlkey=2rbxrqrcwt6lbicv0jbpfqj7&>

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