



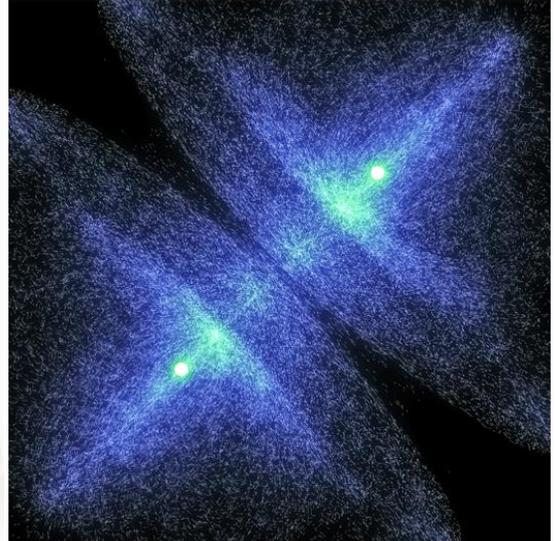
MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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Next generation of creative excellence in Top Arts 2026

The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia | 13 March – 19 July 2026 | Free entry



18 February: Opening 13 March at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, **Top Arts 2026** returns in its 32nd year to showcase the incredible creativity of Victoria's young emerging artists who have excelled in their VCE art studies. Spanning diverse mediums including painting, digital print, and textiles, this year's works explore engaging themes from natural and urban landscapes to reflections on the complexities of time. From nineteenth-century inspired couture to interactive art using computer algorithms, this exhibition celebrates the extraordinary talent of 43 students selected from more than 1100 submissions across metropolitan and regional Victoria.

Highlight works include fashion designs that employ traditional, handmade techniques to explore complex themes of identity and nature. **Lex Blockey's** *Transformations: A reflection of identity* draws from sixteenth to eighteenth-century European silhouettes, using traditional techniques such as hand-embroidery and woodblock printing to explore modern perspectives on gender identity. **Keira Williams' Aboreal reverie** combines crochet, fashion and sculpture to explore the connection between human creativity and the natural world. Through pink tones and floral motifs, the gown transforms the traditional handmade process into a contemporary expression of transformation and renewal.

Dylan Hopkins' work, flow, is the first interactive digital artwork to be included in a Top Arts exhibition. Combining art and computer science, *flow* uses digital software and 3D rendering to create a system of moving particles. Inspired by kinetic sculptures and algorithmic art, the soft blue particles respond to audience interaction. The work creates a calm, playful space that invites viewers to experiment and watch the simulation continually reinvent itself.

Multiple works in the exhibition explore deep connections to land and place. First Nations artist **Rome Jowett-Crociani's** double-sided suspended painting *BOODJURA (fire sticks)* honours Indigenous cultural burning practices and teachings passed down from his Uncle Paul. Using layered surfaces and native gumwood and leaves, the work reflects the cycles of damage and renewal shaped by fire, and how the flame is a vital tool for caring for Country. **Oscar Cooke's Mountains to Oceans** documents a series of moments connected to the beach through photography. The work reflects the cultural identity of surf communities like Torquay, and the ocean's lure on those who live beside it.

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Shaun McKearney's painting *Me vs Me* stages a boxing match between two versions of himself, each wearing garments representing his Irish and American heritage. The boxing ring becomes a visual exploration of inner conflict, belonging, and the pull between different cultural identities. With a similar focus on identity, **Mabel Fowler's** photo series *Unique* is a tribute to the quiet strength and individuality of people living with the rare autoimmune disease, Scleroderma. Through three intimate portraits, Fowler explores how the condition affects each person differently and the unique forms of courage and grace with which they navigate it.

Turning their attention to domestic and personal spaces, many of this year's artists depict how everyday places collect both physical objects and emotional memories. **Sayuni Wickramasinghe's** painting *Burnout* captures an everyday moment in the bedroom of a dedicated but worn-out student. Using warm tones clashing with cool hues, the work reflects the tension between relief and exhaustion - the relentless cycle of burnout. Exploring our human instinct to store, collect and repurpose objects, **Wilby Fredericks'** oil painting *Workshop 5* examines the beauty of sheds, studios and workspaces. With a frame made from his sister's old bed base, his father's old drop sheet as a canvas and his grandmother's old paints, the work honours personal stories embedded in things that are saved and used again over time.

Ben Carroll, Minister for Education said: 'These outstanding student artists have demonstrated impressive talent, and it is an incredible achievement to have their work take centre stage at Australia's most visited gallery.'

Colin Brooks, Minister for Creative Industries said: 'The Victorian Government is proud to back Top Arts 2026 which showcases NGV's commitment to supporting our next generation of creative leaders. This exhibition is free, and is just another example of the accessibility of arts and culture in Victoria.'

Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV said: 'NGV's annual Top Arts exhibition celebrates the creativity and vision of Victoria's most talented young artists. NGV is honoured to provide these exceptional students with a platform to showcase their work, and we look forward to the remarkable contributions they will make to our creative landscape.'

Sophie Smith, General Manager for Customer and Online, Officeworks: 'At Officeworks, we're proud to support the Top Arts exhibition for a fourth year as Principal Partner, through the Officeworks Creativity Award, which recognises the most inventive use of materials in an exhibiting artist's work, committed to helping young artists bring their big ideas to life by providing quality tools at low prices.'

Top Arts 2026 will be on display from 13 March – 19 July 2025 at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Fed Square, Corner of Flinders St & Russell St, Melbourne. Free entry. Further information is available via the [NGV website](#).

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Images:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/sji17nfi4mtiyl6miicy2/ABZhdZnKjUAtzqlaFE_psHs?rlkey=wkcx49dzw6mmgc3d67sx7owib&st=e71wva9j&dl=0

Image Caption (L to R): Sayuni Wickramasinghe, *Burnout* 2025 © Sayuni Wickramasinghe; Lex Blockey, *Transformations: a reflection of identity* 2025 © Lex Blockey; Dylan Hopkins, *flow* 2025 © Dylan Hopkins

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EDUCATION PARTNERS



Artist List:

Sandra Abeywardena	Sunbury Downs College, Sunbury
Lex Blockey	The Geelong College, Geelong
Amelia Bull	Mentone Grammar, Mentone
Ben Burton	Wurun Senior Campus, Fitzroy North
Zindzi Clayford	Fintona Girls' School, Balwyn
Oscar Cooke	Emmanuel College, Warrnambool
Mabel Fowler	Loreto Mandeville Hall Toorak, Toorak
Wilby Fredericks	Woodmans Hill Secondary College, Ballarat East
Milo Friedman	The King David School, Armadale
Willow Hines	Caulfield Grammar School, St Kilda East
Dylan Hopkins	Sandringham College, Sandringham
Meaghan Horner	Billanook College, Mooroolbark
Sophie Igbinovia	St Monica's College, Epping
Audrey Jacques	Viewbank College, Viewbank
Rome Jowett-Crociani	Peninsula Grammar, Mount Eliza
Verity Ladiges	Gladstone Park Secondary College, Gladstone Park
Alexandra Lawry	Leongatha Secondary College, Leongatha
Yoona Liu	Balwyn High School, Balwyn North
Lehan Ma	Balwyn High School, Balwyn North
Clover Marnika	Wesley College, Melbourne
Shaun McKearney	Belmont Highschool, Geelong

Milla Menegazzo	Wesley College, Melbourne
Amaia Mercer	Balwyn High School, Balwyn North
Fyonn Munro	Padua College, Mornington
Poppy Nivarovich	Belmont Highschool, Geelong
Amelia Pezzimenti	St Monica's College, Epping
Felix Pigott	Brighton Grammar School, Brighton
Coco Sargent	Balwyn High School, Balwyn North
Jasmine Sargood	Swinburne Senior Secondary College, Hawthorn
Tess Simmons	Virtual School Victoria
Audrey Strickland-Wilkinson	Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School, Southbank
Shiya Tang	Loreto Mandeville Hall Toorak, Toorak
Carina Tang	Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School, Ivanhoe
Frankie-Belle Taylor	Coburg High School, Coburg
Cassian Walker	Mentone Grammar, Mentone
Brooke Wheeler	Caulfield Grammar School, Wheelers Hill
Sayuni Wickramasinghe	Caulfield Grammar School, Wheelers Hill
Marleah Wilkie	Melbourne Rudolf Steiner School, Warranwood
Keira Williams	Academy of Mary Immaculate, Fitzroy
Geordie Williamson	Bendigo Senior Secondary College, Bendigo
Emi Wong	Penleigh and Essendon Grammar School, Keilor East
Goldman Xu	Camberwell Grammar School, Camberwell
Tim Yarrow	Billanook College, Mooroolbark