

NGV Collections Strategy 2026-29

Executive Summary

The following document provides a vision and strategic directions for building the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) permanent collection, either through purchases, gifts or donation of funds for acquisitions. The information is provided in four sections:

1. Context for the NGV Collection, and the scope, purpose and vision, guiding principles and key performance indicators for the use of the NGV Collections Strategy 2026-29 document.
2. NGV Collections Strategy and exhibition outcomes.
3. Key strategic priorities for collection-building across all collecting areas of the NGV.
4. Strategic priorities organised by NGV Curatorial departments.

1. Context

The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) permanent collection of over 80,000 works is a world class asset for the people of Victoria and is at the heart of the Gallery's activities and planning. Since its foundation in 1861, the NGV Collection has come to span the history and development of Australian, First Nations and international art, design and architecture in all media. It is the only public collection in Australia that coherently represents the history of European art from 1100 CE through to the twenty-first century, as well as the diversity of historical and, increasingly, contemporary art practices from Australia and across the world.

The NGV Collection has been formed in large part through the generosity of its many patrons, most notably the Felton Bequest which was inaugurated in 1904. In addition, the State Government of Victoria provided a grant in 2002, matched by the NGV, as endowment for the Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists (VFLAA) which is used to acquire work by living Australian artists. The Loti & Victor Smorgon Fund since 2008 has also provided an outstanding source of support for major contemporary art acquisitions and commissions.

As the NGV continues to be visited by more people from diverse communities from Australia and internationally and grows to become one of the world's most visited art museums, the permanent collection plays a vital role in the cultural education and participation of many people in our local community and beyond. The use of the NGV Collection in displays, programs and research aims to embrace the continued diversity of cultural identities, artistic practices and geographies, and actively contributes to shaping cultural discourse within Australia.

In a global context, the role of collection development continues to be a leading strategic priority for museums and galleries. In addition to dynamic exhibition programs, collecting institutions are increasingly recognising and utilising the power of their collections to broaden their relevance and impact. Museums seeking to prioritise audience engagement with collections are harnessing their collections through research, publications, programming and curatorial interpretation to better connect art and people. At the NGV, we aim to use collection-building in a way that provides a deeper understanding of art and design from historical to contemporary times through in-depth and cross-departmental or thematic displays, collection-based research and publishing, audience engagement activities and critical enquiry.

The NGV Collections Strategy plays an essential role in realising these aspirations for today and the future.

1.1 Scope

The NGV Collections Strategy provides strategic directions for building the National Gallery of Victoria's permanent collection, and guiding principles for the use of the Collection. It is an intellectual framework for the Gallery's collection development and research activities.

1.2 Purpose and Vision

The NGV's permanent collection exists to generate knowledge, promote understanding and inspire new ideas. The NGV Collections Strategy strives to support the role of the NGV Collection in achieving these aspirations.

1.3 Guiding Principles

The NGV Collections Strategy links with the NGV Strategic Direction, in particular the following areas:

- Bringing art and design to life: Tell more relevant and diverse stories by broadening our holdings of contemporary art while continuing to acquire key works of historical art.
- Connecting audiences: Connect audiences with knowledge and ideas.
- Realising our potential: Strengthen and enhance our international profile to enable greater opportunities for our Collection, exhibitions, programs, and philanthropy.
- Building for the future: Advocate and plan for a destination building to house, display and ensure the community's access to the best of Australian and international contemporary art and design.
- Sharing our vision: Celebrate a strong history of philanthropy and actively seek future giving.

1.4 Key Performance Indicators

The success of the NGV Collections Strategy is guided by the following:

- The use of new acquisitions in enhancing permanent collection displays and exhibitions;
- The support of contemporary Australian art, with a focus on Melbourne and Victorian practitioners, and international artists and designers, including commissioning new works for display;
- The promotion of the permanent collection to the visiting public through audience engagement and learning initiatives, marketing and social media, publishing and media;
- The use of the permanent collection to generate new research and scholarship;
- The strategic growth of the permanent collection to enable the NGV to become a three-site institution encompassing Australian art, international art, and contemporary art and design.