



MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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First Margaret Preston retrospective in more than twenty years offers groundbreaking new perspectives on Australia's modernist master

The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia | 4 September 2026 - 31 January 2027 | Ticketed



3 September 2026: Celebrated for her bold floral still lifes and strikingly modern woodblock prints, iconic Australian artist **Margaret Preston** (1875–1963) was a central figure in the development of modernism in Australia who significantly shaped the country's cultural and aesthetic landscape. The first exhibition on the artist in more than two decades, *Margaret Preston*, charts the artist's career through more than 200 of her paintings, prints and sculpture, alongside archival materials. The landmark exhibition also contextualises Preston's practice and legacy by placing her work in direct dialogue with that of her peers, as well as work by contemporary First Nations artists.

Opening 4 September at the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, the NGV's new retrospective exhibition will feature Preston's most celebrated works, including *Flannel flowers* 1938 and *Shoalhaven Gorge, New South Wales* 1940–41 from the NGV Collection, alongside key loans from the National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales and Art Gallery of South Australia, including *The studio window* 1906, *Implement blue* 1927, and *Aboriginal flowers* 1928. The exhibition also includes 20 works by First Nations and contemporary artists who have responded to Preston's oeuvre and contextualise her appropriation of Indigenous visual culture. These include world-premiere commissions by the late Bidjigal artist Marilyn Russell and Warumungu artist Jimmy Frank Jupurrurla; new acquisitions by senior Tiwi artists Raelene Kerinauia, Mary Elizabeth Moreen, and Kaye Brown; as well as work by Girramay, Yidinji and Kuku Yalanji artist Tony Albert, Wadawurrung artist Deanne Gilson, the late Ngarrindjeri artist Trevor Nickolls, and Gordon Bennett.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a major monographic publication, edited by Beckett Rozentals and Michael Gentle, that explores how Preston's legacy endures in the story of Australian art and design. Offering an in-depth survey of Preston's career, the book brings together key works and fresh scholarship from leading writers, curators and art historians, including Chiaki Ajioka, Geoffrey Batchen, Elle Freak, Jennifer Higgie, Lévi McLean, Anne Ryan, Lisa Slade and Julia Waite. The publication is supported by Darcy Brennan & Deborah Galbraith and the Darcy Brennan Foundation.

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The exhibition spans Preston's prolific career – from her early career works from the 1900s, through to works created during the mid-twentieth century. Highlights include her vivid still life paintings influenced by Post-Impressionists such as Paul Cézanne and Paul Gauguin, whose work Preston saw while travelling through Europe. These include *Still life with teapot* 1915 and *The teapot cosy* 1916, which mark Preston's shift towards a brighter palette and a looser handling of form.

The NGV exhibition also features an outstanding collection of over 30 woodblock prints from the mid-1920s that would come to define Preston's oeuvre. These include beloved hand-coloured and monochromatic prints depicting local flowers, Australian birds, and vistas across Sydney and its harbour. Having studied print making overseas, Preston brought an informed understanding of woodblock techniques to Sydney's artistic community. Her use of Japanese print techniques with a distinctly Australian subject matter positioned her as a key figure in the development of modernist printmaking in the country.

Margaret Preston also includes 16 works from the artist's landmark solo exhibition at Grosvenor Galleries in Sydney in 1929, a presentation which signalled her transition to painting exclusively local flora. Highlights include *N.S.W everlasting flowers* 1929, in which Preston portrays a vase of Australian paper daisies alongside a shell work box collected from the La Perouse Mission in Botany Bay. Bidjigal and Gweagal women have practised shell work since the late nineteenth century and the example in Preston's painting has been identified as the work of Queen Emma Timbery. Timbery's great-great-granddaughter, Marilyn Russell, has been commissioned to produce three shell work boxes especially for the NGV exhibition, demonstrating how Indigenous artistic knowledge and practice continues to pass down generational lines.

Following a battle with cancer, Preston moved to Berowra, NSW in 1932 to recuperate. Here, she turned her attention to the local flora, rendering them in some of her most ambitious – and recognisable – compositions. Standout works on display include the colourful still life paintings *Australian flowers* and *Native flowers on a striped cloth*, both 1932, which contrast with her earlier woodblock prints by presenting a more gestural treatment of flowers as though freshly gathered from the bush. The NGV exhibition also features nine of the largest and most ambitious paintings from the artist's landmark international exhibitions in New York and San Francisco in 1939, including *Flannel flowers* 1938, now part of the NGV Collection.

Throughout 1940s Preston extensively explored Australia, visiting numerous rock art sites across Queensland, South Australia, New South Wales and the Northern Territory, including Bathurst and Melville islands. These journeys greatly influenced the next chapter of Preston's artistic life, redirecting her focus towards expansive landscapes. The NGV exhibition features a number of outstanding landscape paintings from the 1940s, including *Flying over the Shoalhaven River* 1942, which has been captured from an elevated vantage point, giving the work an aerial, map-like clarity, the topography flattened into rhythmic shapes and textured surfaces.

Preston's pursuit of a distinctly Australian art, independent from European art centres, culminated in her appropriation of Indigenous Australian art, design and iconography. This complex legacy has generated ongoing critical engagement from contemporary First Nations artists, many of whom have responded to, repurposed and reframed Preston's visual language. The first to do so was the late Ngarrindjeri artist Trevor Nickolls, with his 1988 *Homage to Margaret Preston*. Nickolls' painting incorporates defining elements of Preston's work, most notably her ongoing exploration of Australian floral still life. By presenting his own floral composition in a vase decorated with stylised dot motifs and earth-toned patterns, Nickolls acknowledges Preston's role in encouraging non-Indigenous artists to 'borrow' from First Nations imagery, helping to popularise Aboriginal-inspired decorative objects and commercial products from the 1940s onwards.

The exhibition also features historical Tunga (bark baskets) as well as sandstone sculptures by Linda Craigie and Nora Nathan which Preston collected during her travels in the 1940s and gifted to the Australian Museum and Art Gallery of New South Wales respectively in 1948. Tunga are crafted from folded sheets of eucalyptus bark, overlaid with intricate designs in ochre of ancestral stories, knowledges or kinship relations. The NGV exhibition will feature newly acquired contemporary Tunga produced by senior artists Kaye Brown, Raelene Kerinauia Lampuwatu and Mary Elizabeth Moreen that respond to Margaret Preston's Tiwi-influenced paintings.

Vicki Ward MP, Minister for Creative Industries said: 'Margaret Preston is an iconic Australian artist; a trailblazing woman whose artworks were distinctly Australian. Accompanied by new work by First Nations artists, this exhibition will be a major drawcard -yet again highlighting why the NGV is one of the most visited art galleries in the world and so important to our creative state.'

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Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV said: '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. This landmark exhibition has been curated by an interdisciplinary team of Australian and First Nations art curators, who have collaborated extensively with Indigenous communities on how to approach this conversation with sensitivity and care.'

Beckett Rozentals, exhibition co-curator and Senior Curator, Australian Art, NGV said: 'Margaret Preston is one of Australia's most recognisable and beloved artists. This landmark exhibition gives audiences the opportunity to experience how her early travels abroad informed a bold synthesis of international artistic influencers, and her development of a distinctive artistic style that greatly shaped Australian modernism.'

Michael Gentle, exhibition co-curator and former Curator, Australian and First Nations Art, NGV said: 'Contemporary artists have been crucial in rethinking Margaret Preston's practice, particularly her appropriative aesthetic. By placing her work in dialogue with those who have since interrogated it, we invite audiences to see that the visual culture underpinning 'Australianness' was never neutral or fixed, rather that it is a field of relation and contestation. Exploring the lasting impact of Preston's work on identity, art, culture and politics reminds us that history is never simply past; it actively shapes the problems we grapple with today.'

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.melbourne)

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, first between 1904 and 1906, and again between 1912 and 1919. Participating in the growing discourses surrounding modernism abroad, 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 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.

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Image Caption (L to R): Installation view of Margaret Preston's *Self Portrait* 1930 in *Margaret Preston*, on display 4 September 2026 – 31 January 2027 at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne. Installation view of *Margaret Preston* on display 4 September 2026 – 31 January 2027 at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne. Installation view of Margaret Preston's *Still life* 1915 (left) and *Still life* c. 1915-16 (right) in *Margaret Preston*, on display 4 September 2026 – 31 January 2027 at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne. Installation view of Margaret Preston's *Oranges* 1908 (left) and *Still life with mandarins* c. 1908 in *Margaret Preston*, on display 4 September 2026 – 31 January 2027 at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne. Installation view of Margaret Preston's *Native honeysuckle*

1933 in *Margaret Preston*, on display 4 September 2026 – 31 January 2027 at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne. Photos: Phoebe Powell

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