



MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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Ben Quilty: The Unimpressionist

The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia at Fed Square | 25 March 2027 – 19 September 2027 | Ticketed



27 October 2026: The world premiere exhibition, *Ben Quilty: The Unimpressionist*, features over 80 new and recent works by one of Australia's most respected and prolific artists, including a new seven-metre-long landscape painting and a sculpture incorporating a Ford Mustang car. Quilty is celebrated for his instantly-recognisable gestural oil paintings and has won some of Australia's highest cultural accolades, including the Archibald Prize (2011).

Opening 25 March at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia at Fed Square, *Ben Quilty: The Unimpressionist* explores the legacy of Australian Impressionism, looking beneath the beauty of these landscapes to the stories of cultural erasure, environmental decay and loss omitted within the original works. The exhibition brings together an important selection of Quilty's signature impasto canvases and watercolours, alongside ambitious never-before-seen sculpture and installations that push the artist's practice into bold new territory.

Directly referencing the legacy of Australian Impressionism, Quilty's new monumental seven-metre-long landscape painting, *Clapped Out: Rorschach after Streeton*, 2026, reworks the Arthur Streeton painting *The purple noon's transparent might*, 1896, held in the NGV Collection, which depicts the upper reaches of the Hawkesbury River. Quilty's monumental doubled image is made by pressing together wet canvases to create mirrored symmetrical compositions resembling the Rorschach inkblot test used in psychology. By reworking Streeton's 1896 landscape painting as a giant Rorschach, Quilty asks us to reconsider images central to building our national perceptions of the landscape and see what else has been redacted or could be concealed within these landscape scenes.

A companion series, *The Reckonings*, 2022 – 2026, is painted directly onto print reproductions of Streeton landscapes bought from secondhand stores, flea markets and online. Quilty visits Streeton's original vantage points and repaints the scenes by including today's realities, such as urban sprawl and land degradation, now evident from the sites. Quilty's engagement is neither a takedown nor a tribute: Streeton campaigned for the environment in his own time. Quilty extends that advocacy as much as he interrogates the myths the work helped to establish.

Further highlights include a large series of watercolours painted en plein air in Antarctica depicting icebergs as symbols of ecological decline. These poignant, moving images were visual records made by Quilty when he visited Antarctica in 2023 with his son and witnessed the retreat of sea ice and the decay of glaciers firsthand.

The exhibition also features several new large-scale sculptural works, including *Reverb*, 2026, in which a 2018 5lt V8 Ford Mustang is transformed with the addition of a giant grotesque bonnet scoop, rendering the car undriveable.

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From within the scoop emits the calls of an Antarctic penguin colony, collapsing the distance between Australian car culture and the environment through this unique soundscape created in collaboration with Philip Samartzis. According to Quilty, the sculpture is made from anger – “fury at our inability to legislate to stop the burning of fossil fuels”.

The Wastelands, 2026 – the first whole-room installation Quilty has created at this scale and ambition – is a vast forest built from upcycled antique red cedar furniture, populated with hundreds of taxidermied birds: victims of cars, cats, poison, guns, fishing hooks and window strike. Featuring a wedge-tailed eagle, penguin, sacred kingfisher, swift parrot and black cockatoo, the specimens were gathered over two years with the help of a wide network of vets, wildlife refuges and community members. The work is at once an indictment of everyday indifference towards nature and an elegy, with Quilty asking the audience to consider whether we are comfortable accepting creatures as ‘collateral damage’ to our own activities.

The exhibition also features a sculpture representing a 1:1 reproduction of the 8m-wide stump of a recently felled Eucalyptus regnans. Cut down in the Valley of the Giants in Tasmania, the tree once stood more than 100-metres tall and was felled simply to make space for plantation forestry. Using advanced technologies, Quilty 3D-scanned the original stump and reproduced it with a large-scale robot printer in white recycled plastic. The ghostly, monumental result highlights Tasmania’s ongoing discourse around old-growth logging and the environmental, cultural and social challenges it poses.

Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV, said: ‘Few artists have captured popular attention in Australia like Ben Quilty. Deeply passionate about Australia’s natural environment and ecosystems, Ben draws attention to the climate change through works of art that are at once moving, contemplating and confronting. We’re delighted to be hosting Ben’s first-ever solo exhibition here at the NGV – and helping him to realise some of his most ambitious work to date.’

Professor Simon Tormey, Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts and Education at exhibition Principal Partner Deakin University, said: ‘Ben Quilty’s work confronts the emotional and environmental consequences of climate change with characteristic urgency and force. At Deakin, where we teach and research across the Creative Arts, we are proud to support work that challenges audiences to reflect on our relationship with the natural world. This collaboration with the NGV evidences our commitment to the arts as a vital space for critical thinking and public debate.’

Of the exhibition, artist Ben Quilty said: ‘I know I’m not the only one to be deeply unimpressed with the lack of effective action on climate change and ecological decline. I am truly unimpressed. And I also grew up falling into Australian impressionism, the light, the landscape and its characters. I’ve been hugely inspired by the stand Arthur Streeton took against the environmental vandalism of his own time. This show examines the lens through which the Australian impressionist movement viewed and shaped the Australian landscape, but more poignantly, the role those paintings played in the mis-historicization of that period of Australian culture.’

Ben Quilty: The Unimpressionist will be on display at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia at Fed Square from 25 March 2027 – 19 September 2027. Admission fees apply. Information and tickets are available via the NGV website: [NGV.MELBOURNE](https://www.ngv.melbourne)

ABOUT BEN QUILTY

Ben Quilty’s rich impasto paintings challenge assumptions, using bold and unsettling subjects to explore the problematic relationship between the personal and the cultural. Based in New South Wales, he holds Bachelor degrees in both Visual Arts and Design from Sydney University. Quilty has been a finalist in the prestigious Wynne and Archibald prizes. He won the Doug Moran National Portrait Prize in 2009 and the Archibald Prize in 2011 with his portrait of artist, Margaret Olley. Also in 2011, Quilty travelled to Afghanistan as an official war artist with The Australian War Memorial. He was invited by World Vision Australia to travel to Greece, Serbia and Lebanon with author, Richard Flanagan, to witness firsthand the international refugee crisis in 2016.

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His work is represented in numerous major public, corporate and private collections including the National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Art Gallery of South Australia, National Gallery of Victoria and QAGOMA. In 2019 the Art Gallery of South Australia presented the first major survey exhibition of Quilty's work, touring to the Art Gallery of NSW and QAGOMA.

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Image Caption: Portrait of Ben Quilty Photo: Brett Boardman

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