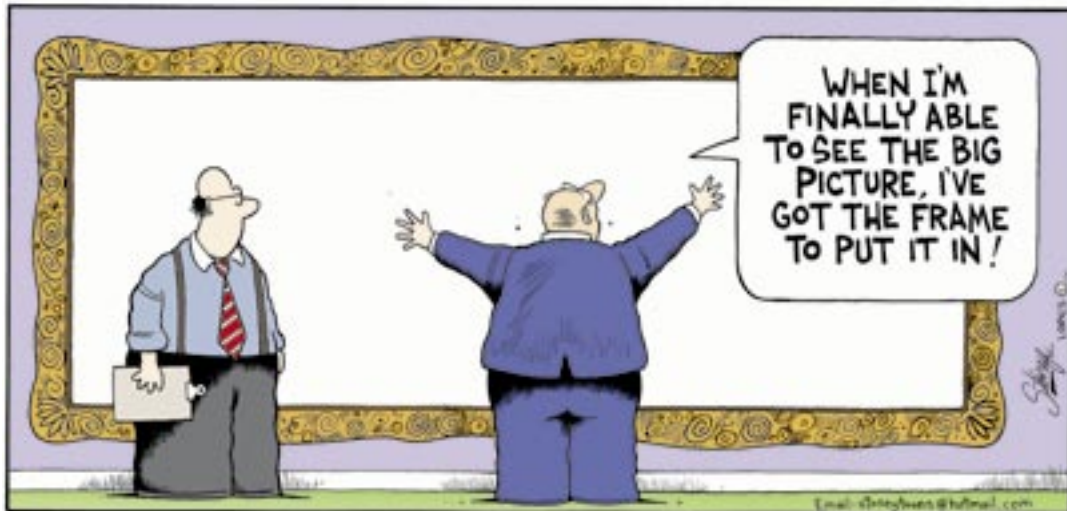




A Vision for the National Gallery of Australia

Ron Radford



Cartoon courtesy Stoneyfourns

A Vision for the National Gallery of Australia

Presented to the National Gallery Council June and August 2005

The core functions of an art museum are “to preserve, research and interpret works of art, and their accompanying information, for the public benefit”. A great art museum, therefore, is one that collects and conserves works of great aesthetic excellence, researches them with rigorous scholarship, and then uses the results of its research to interpret works of art for the museum’s various audiences. A great art museum should be a powerhouse from which visitors and other users can always receive a charge of psychic energy.

A “National Gallery”, especially one in the national capital of a federation like Australia, Canada or the United States, has various audiences — not only the local residents but also the nation’s entire citizenship. They are often non-attenders of museums in, say, home cities like Melbourne or Brisbane, Toronto or Vancouver, Boston or Chicago but are tempted to attend while on a visit to their national capitals in Canberra, Ottawa and Washington. Further, there are politically sensitive audiences, and the local embassies, which note the presence or absence of honour given to the art of their own part of the world.

Our vision should comprise, first and foremost, the presentation of works of highest artistic excellence. Our inexperienced nationwide visitors are less willing than frequent gallery-goers to enjoy academic points of art-historical or cultural significance; the broad audiences respond less to cultural analysis than to aesthetic force. We should also accommodate some of the international politico-cultural expectations peculiar to Canberra audiences.

There are, as well, two flagship roles. One is to be the leading research and interpretation centre for Australian art — and in the not-too-distant future to create a formal Centre for Australian Art that will be both a research institute and a public-education centre. The other is to set professional standards for, and provide professional-development assistance to Australia’s smaller art museums.

However, this vision statement, requested by Council, is chiefly concerned with two high-priority matters that have already been raised for its members:

1, a refocusing of the collections and hence of policy for future acquisitions and,

2, a concept for an improved National Gallery building.

A nation should first treasure its own culture, and then that of its close neighbours, as well as participate in the world’s internationalised contemporary culture. In its national art museums a mature nation should strongly reflect a confident appreciation of its own art and a sympathetic interest in that of its neighbours. Our Australian culture, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, has always been a highly visual one. The National Gallery of Australia’s collections, exhibitions, publications and building must therefore proudly echo our national and international cultural and strategic aspirations.

For a nation formed over only two centuries, but with an ancient Indigenous past, Australia’s new National Gallery should not try to emulate the national museums of the European Old World, formed from princely and aristocratic collections or those formed by the robber barons in the United States. Nor should we repeat the British colonial collections formed from the mid nineteenth century onwards in Australia’s six colonial capitals.

I believe we should be even more *unlike* all other “National Galleries” than we are at present. Our geography, our recent past and Indigenous past give the National Gallery of Australia its future direction.



Arthur Streeton 1867 - 1943
The selector's hut (Whelan on the log) 1890
Oil on canvas
Purchased 1961

The Collections

The collections are the core of the National Gallery of Australia — they must remain the kernel of the building and the central focus of the institution. No blockbuster exhibition can ever be as large, as valuable, as wide-ranging and as consistently high in quality as the collection displays. The three-billion-dollar collections of the National Gallery of Australia are owned by all Australians for the enjoyment of all Australians and international visitors. Those audiences expect to find the collections well maintained and imaginatively used.

The collections have many strengths. They include the sole strong twentieth-century European & American collection to be found not only in Australia but also in the Asia Pacific region — a collection that covers all media. Besides paintings and sculptures it embraces modern European & American decorative arts and design, and the holdings of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European & American Prints and Photographs are among the very largest and most important in the world.

The Asian collections also have considerable strength and they represent most Asian cultures, with an emphasis on India and Southeast Asia. The Indonesian textile collection and the Indian trade-cloth collection are the largest and finest in the world.

There is a small but high-quality collection of the art of our closest Pacific neighbours — namely the regions of Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia which include Maori art from New Zealand and the art of New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, Hawaii and other Pacific islands. Apart from major paintings by the great Colin McCahon, and various works on paper, New Zealand's pakeha (settler) art is not yet well represented.

Australia's own visual culture looks extremely impressive in a strong and representative collection from all periods and all regions and cultures. We have by far the largest Indigenous Australian art collection of any art museum. The collection of Australian art from the 1940s onwards is unrivalled.



Grace Cossington Smith 1892–1984
The bridge in building 1929–30
oil on pulpboard
Gift of Ellen Waugh 2005

Our collections are strong in all media. The Australian print collection is the only near-encyclopaedic collection. The twentieth-century Australian drawing collection is unrivalled, and the Australian decorative-arts collection, which includes folk arts, is also very strong.

No state gallery needs to aspire in this way to such a large and comprehensive collection of Australian art as the National Gallery of Australia. (For instance, the only other major art museum to embrace folk arts within its policy for decorative arts is Adelaide's, just as it is the only one that has high-quality Australian paintings and sculptures from all regions and periods. Melbourne's National Gallery of Victoria, on the other hand, has a very Melbourne-centred collection of Australian art.) Our attention to all regions means that visitors from, say, Queensland, Western Australia, the Northern Territory or Tasmania, are already pleasantly surprised by the excellence of their own art in the context of the whole of Australian art. The collection can effectively give the Australian people a sense of ownership of, and contribution to, a great tradition of art-making. The regional comprehensiveness is a base on which future audience-building can occur, both in bringing audiences to the national capital, and then bringing them on from the Australian War Memorial and New Parliament House to the National Gallery.

The above — Australian art, Asia Pacific art, and modern art worldwide — are the strengths on which we should build.

The 1966 Lindsay Report from a “National Art Gallery Committee of Inquiry”, commissioned by Prime Minister Menzies, is our founding document. The Lindsay Report placed its greatest emphasis on modern art worldwide, on the whole of Australian art, and on “works of art representing the high cultural achievement of Australia’s neighbours in southern and eastern Asia and the Pacific Islands”. Similarly the 1994 *Acquisitions Policy: National Gallery of Australia*, the most carefully-considered such document developed and published by a National Gallery Council, also emphasised Australasian (i.e. Pacific) art. The present vision statement is therefore partly a reaffirmation of past Council policies that have not yet been fully implemented.



The Ambum stone
Papua New Guinea c.1500 BCE
Greywacke stone
Purchased 1977

Vision for the Collections

A central focus of the National Gallery of Australia should always be the Australian collection.

The Asia Pacific Region should also be a major focus. It can mirror the strategic importance of our geographic neighbours and our special allies.



This map centred on Canberra shows the areas of the globe upon which the National Gallery's concentration should focus.

Canberra, the capital of Australia, is a twentieth-century city created by Australians for Australians. Canberra does not have the British colonial history of the state capital cities. The six state art galleries were all founded during the British colonial period, and began with British collections that remain for them a strength. This is also the case for some of the large Australian regional galleries formed in the nineteenth century such as those at Ballarat, Bendigo, Warrnambool, Geelong and Launceston.

The National Gallery of Australia's collections were formed largely in the last quarter of the twentieth century; the building opened in Canberra in 1982, in the second-last decade of that century. Its collections rightly reflect recent Australian history and, situated in the national political capital, should also be highly relevant to Australia's contemporary strategic engagement.

Australia and our region

It is crucial therefore that the National Gallery should have a very strong focus on Australian art including Australian Indigenous art, and art from all states and territories. We should represent all kinds of Australian art, from the late-eighteenth to the twenty-first century, supremely well.

The collections should also embrace the art of our nearest neighbours — New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Pacific Islands, Indonesia, other Southeast Asian countries and India.

China, Japan, Korea, the Himalayan countries, the Middle East and Central Asia should be represented but they are further to the periphery. It is unnecessary, and too late, to duplicate Melbourne and Sydney's more comprehensive Chinese collections, and Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne's significant Japanese collections. In this way, while emphasising our immediate region, we will not be competing in the main collecting areas of the state galleries. Indeed our collections should, where possible, complement theirs. (For example, Adelaide has a very comprehensive Southeast Asian ceramic collection but we will not be competing in this area.)

To complement, not compete with the state collections is particularly important as the buying power of the combined Australian art museums is now more limited than formerly in comparison with the wealthier museums of Europe and America. It is desirable that Australia's limited combined acquisition resources be used carefully and strategically. The National Gallery of Australia should always be seen to be doing the right thing nationally in this way.

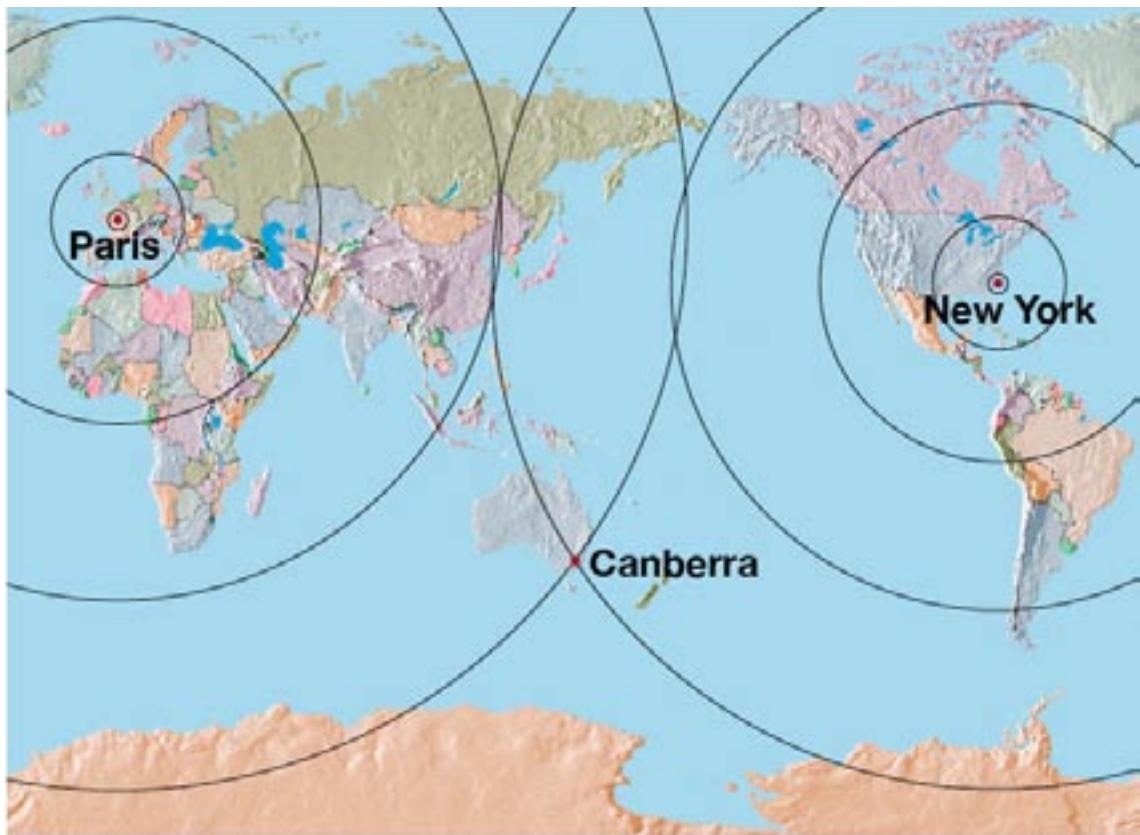
No state gallery concentrates on art, past and present, of the Pacific region. Those in Melbourne and Sydney are more committed to North Asian art than Southeast Asian art. Brisbane concentrates on contemporary Asia Pacific Art.

Only Adelaide has a sizeable Middle Eastern Islamic collection. The National Gallery already holds a few Middle Eastern and Mughal Islamic objects and should further develop a small, high-quality collection of work from this artistically rich culture, hitherto neglected by Australia's collecting institutions. Such a collection is also relevant to our holdings of Southeast Asian Islamic art.

European & American 20th Century

As noted, the National Gallery of Australia holds the only major collection of European & American twentieth-century art in our part of the world. For a National Gallery starting late in the twentieth century, it made sense to focus on this area. In Canberra, mid-to-late-nineteenth-century European art has been collected as a precursor to the twentieth century, an area not especially well represented by the state galleries. (Before the then conservative state galleries realised the importance of many of the major twentieth-century artists, it was already too late to afford a full range of major works in this area.) Indeed early-twentieth-century Modernism and late-nineteenth-century European art have been the most expensive kinds of art for over sixty years, and still remain so.

The early-twentieth-century International collection, otherwise representative, only lacks paintings by Kandinsky (the first abstract painter), Mondrian, Braque, Klee and Beckmann. It also lacks a major Picasso. Our fine American collection of the second half of the twentieth century only lacks works by major artists Barnett Newman and Cy Twombly. Considering how large and important the existing collection is, these gaps are few but significant, and it will require enormous financial resources to fill them. Australia badly needs major paintings by Kandinsky, Mondrian and Barnett Newman. The National Gallery is the only art museum in Australia that could conceivably afford works by such significant artists in the future, and its collection is the only one that provides a very strong context for their display.



This map shows the art centre of Paris, most important for avant-garde Western art from the early 1800s to the 1940s. It also shows New York, an important centre of Western art from the 1940s to about 1980. They are the centres for Canberra's international collection as distinct from the art of our own region. If one were to do a similar map for Australia's state galleries, London would be the epicentre. Melbourne and Adelaide's state galleries would have a smaller centre at Rome. Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney's would also have a centre at Tokyo and Melbourne, and Sydney's would have another at Beijing.

It is interesting to note that when the National Gallery began, from the early 1970s, to buy American art with enthusiasm, America led the world in cutting-edge art, as had been the case since the mid 1940s.

It is essential that the Gallery should continue buying good contemporary art worldwide, and not only from the Asia Pacific Region. Yet America can also be seen as part of the Pacific Rim and, as it happens, America's emergence in the 1940s as an art power coincides with Australia's powerful and continuing defence and economic alliance with the United States. The National Gallery's well-developed American collection, and its continuing worldwide attention to contemporary art, can be regarded as politically strategic.

In filling major gaps in the International, Asian, Pacific, and Australian collections it is important that the National Gallery buy works of the highest quality, which can always be on display. To this end we should acquire fewer objects of better quality. Buying objects for study storage should not be an option. If a costly work cannot be considered an object for permanent display, then its acquisition should be questioned.

New Acquisition Policy and Ten Year Acquisition Strategy

The Gallery is in the process of adapting the previous Acquisitions Policy (1994). The new Acquisition Policy will be an important public document. Concurrently the Gallery should also develop a confidential Ten Year Acquisition Strategy. The latter, an innovative, competitive and strategic document (or series of documents for each curatorial area), should outline in detail the serious gaps in the collections, and even highlight known works, in private collections, which are needed for the National Gallery. The weaknesses of the collections should be fully documented, particularly the limitations of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Australian collection, the lack of depth in the Indian and Southeast Asian sculpture & painting collection, the currently limited contemporary Asia Pacific collection and the twentieth- and twenty-first century International design collection. Once approved, this Ten Year Acquisition Strategy should be strictly adhered to.

Dormant Collections

The National Gallery's collections, put together recently, over just three decades, cannot be expected to geographically cover most areas of world art in historical depth, as do many long-established national museums overseas. In order to focus the acquisition resources (and limited display space) we need to concentrate on what is central to Australia's National Collection of Art, and do this exceptionally well. The collection areas we concentrate on should look highly credible not only to the rest of Australia but also to the rest of the world.

Therefore, we should not direct further acquisition resources to the small but excellent African, Pre-Columbian American, and North American Indigenous collections, or to the tiny and imbalanced European Old Master collection. The four dormant collections contain many fine works and will be held in trust for Australia; the African and North American Indigenous holdings are the only such high-quality public collections in Australia. These collections should be added to only by occasional gift. They could be displayed in small groups



Mark Rothko 1903 - 1970
Brown, black on maroon 1957
Oil on canvas
Purchased 1981

— there are hallway possibilities for showcase display — and they may be displayed occasionally in various contexts in the temporary-exhibitions galleries; for example, Indigenous objects that came from the collection of the surrealist artist Max Ernst deserve to receive a focused study within the context of Surrealism. In the case of the African and Pre-Columbian art, we could consider the possibility that some works be lent from time to time to other Australian institutions perhaps for three-year periods. (For instance, Perth is intending to have a closer relationship with African contemporary art and some of the African works could be lent there. Melbourne has a permanent display of Pre-Columbian art and is contemplating borrowing some of the pieces for display, which we should oblige.)

In the more attention-getting area of European Old Masters, Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney have relatively substantial collections. Melbourne and Adelaide in particular have been collecting Old Master pictures since the end of the nineteenth century. The National Gallery has fewer than twenty European Old Master paintings and sculptures, in Australia a collection fifth in size after Brisbane's. The fifth collection of this material in Australia is insignificant in world terms. Although there are some fine individual works in the National Gallery's collection of European Old Masters, it is not cohesive and looks out of place in a contemporary building with such strong contemporary collections. Twenty works can never represent 500 years of European painting and sculpture. Even though Old Master paintings are usually much less costly than nineteenth- and twentieth-century Modern Masters, it would now require impossibly huge resources to equal Melbourne, Adelaide or even Sydney's longstanding Old Master collections. We will consider lending our European Old Masters to the three Australian state galleries that have long made a commitment to collecting in this area. Even Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney's collections are not large compared with European and American collections of the same material — yet supplemented with our works they have a better chance to show a fuller history of European art for Australian audiences. The National Gallery of Australia would be regarded as generous and truly national by lending works for long-term display to the state galleries, always to be labelled as on loan from the National Gallery of Australia. Long-term loans of Old Master paintings and sculptures could be rotated between Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. Any works they don't want to borrow could be offered to other state galleries. Nonetheless we could borrow them back occasionally for exhibitions in context.



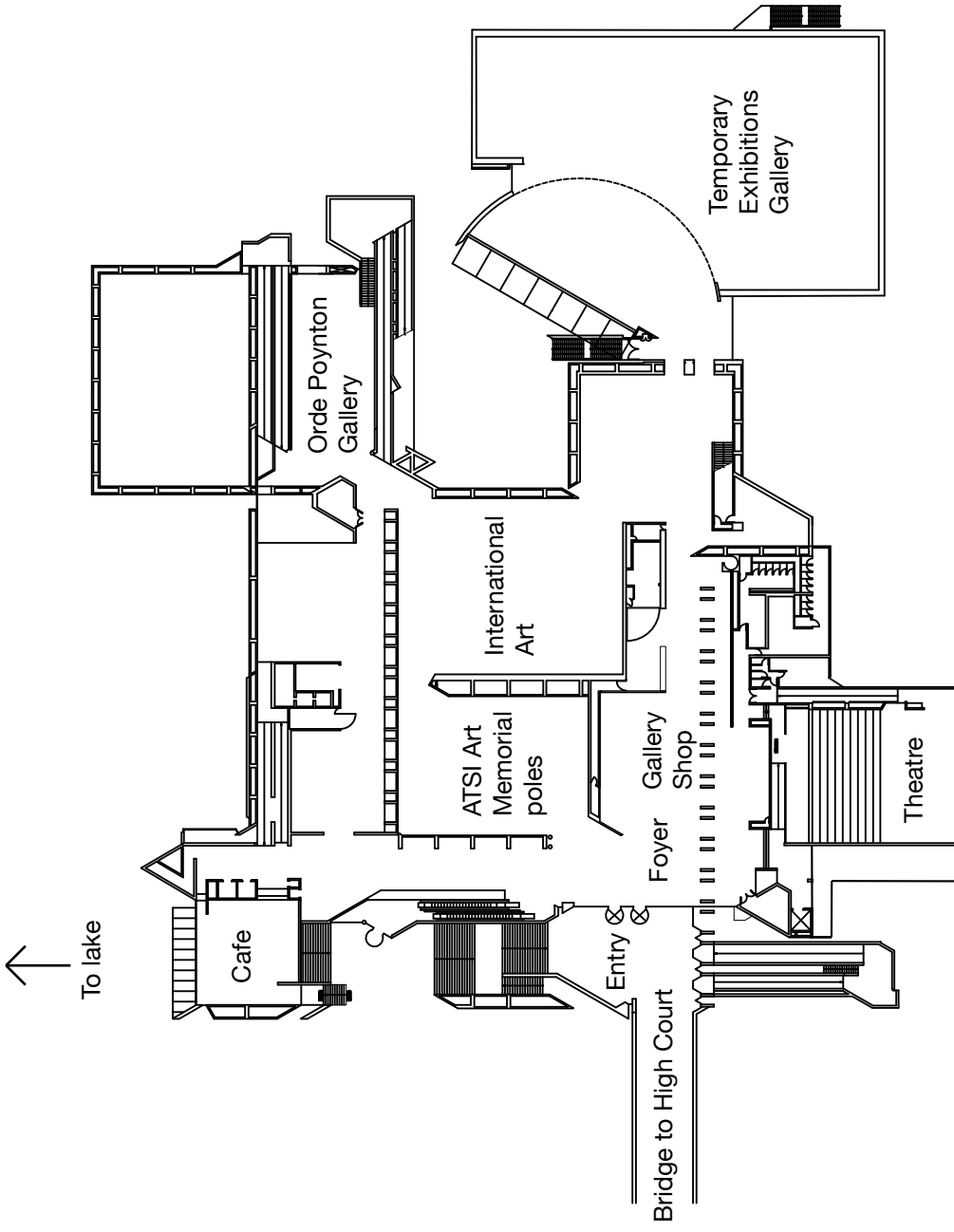
Henri Matisse 1869-1954
Costume for a mourner in Le Chant du rossignol 1920
Coat with attached hood: cream cotton-wool felt,
navy silk-cotton velvet appliqué, black ink
Purchased 1973

The building and collection displays

The National Gallery of Australia's building was conceived in the late 1960s. Plans, by the architectural firm Edwards Madigan Torzillo & Briggs, were finished at the beginning of the Seventies, before the collections were formed. It took nearly a decade to build. Opened by H.M. Queen Elizabeth II in 1982, it is an important architectural example of Seventies concrete architecture in the Brutalist style. Costing \$82 million, it was an extremely expensive building for its time. The building has architectural distinction and is part of Canberra's heritage. However, as an art museum it has always been criticised by the museum profession and the public alike, particularly as its interior is unsympathetic to most works of art. The building has been an ongoing challenge to former and current directors and curators of the Gallery. There were conceptual problems and unwise decisions in the earliest brief.

Since the National Gallery had neither collections nor staff when the building was first designed, it could not be designed around a known or probable collection. Moreover, it was conceived to show 1,000 works, but the collections have grown to well over 100,000 works. The collections have long outgrown the building and lack of display space is overwhelmingly the Gallery's greatest problem. There are many other limitations to the building. Ceilings are far too high in the main entrance-level display galleries and too low on the upstairs display floor. The concrete-aggregate wall surface visually interferes with the viewing of most paintings. The public entrance is confusing; visitors don't know where to enter the building. Confusing interior circulation remains an ongoing complaint by members of the public. The facilities for openings, other events, and catering are limited. There has never been any special provision for the display of Indigenous Australian art, now a major component of the collection.

Many of these problems will be addressed in Stage One of the building alterations currently being planned, in which process Andrew Andersons, of PTW Architects, and myself are working with Col Madigan.



National Gallery of Australia- ground floor existing conditions

Building Additions Stage One.

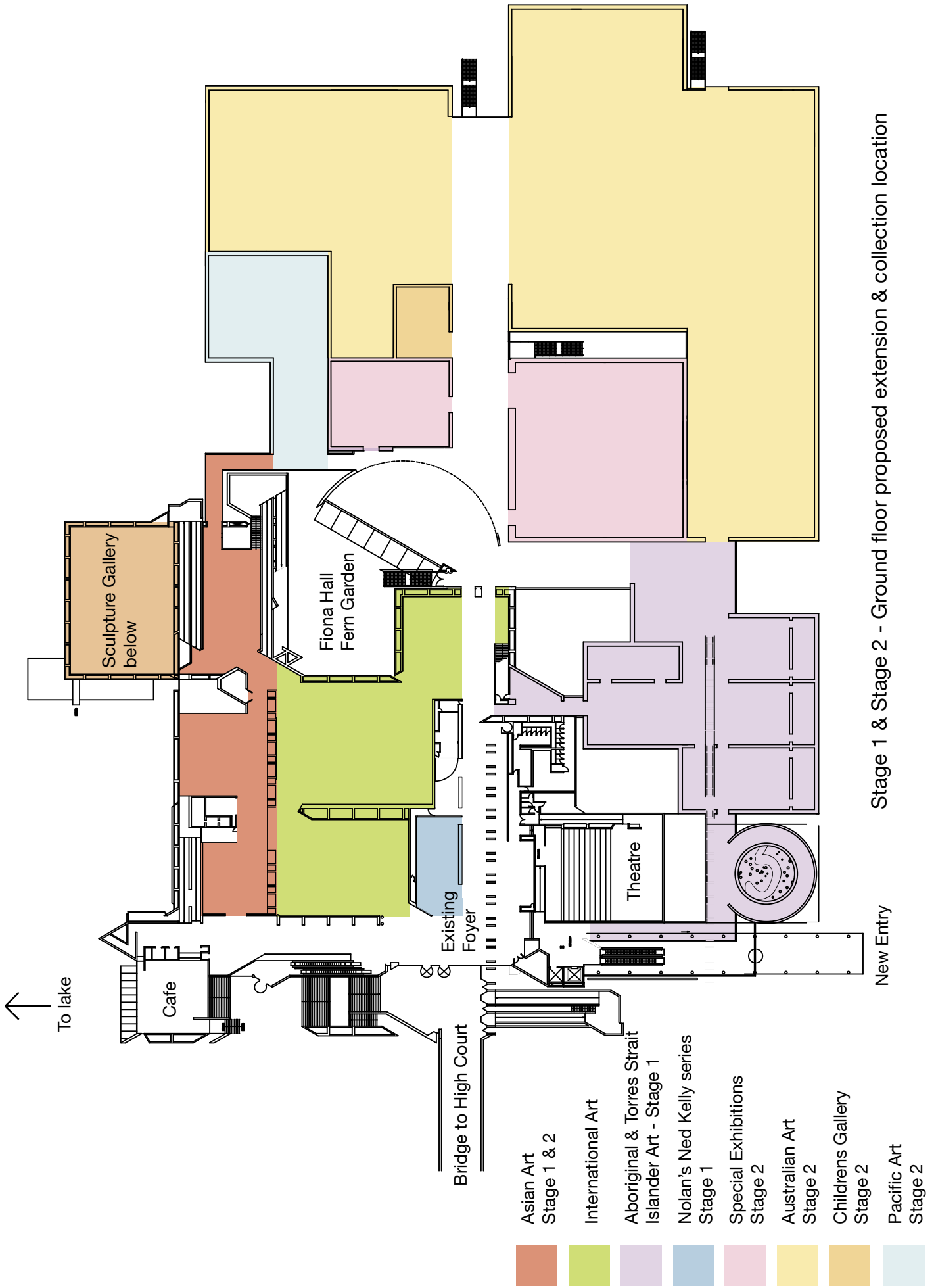
New Entrance and Indigenous Australian Galleries

In Stage One a new more visible and accessible ground-level entrance is being planned for the south of the building, facing the current ground-surface car park. The new entrance area will have escalators to and from the galleries on the main level; a lift will also provide access to and from the underground car park. The entrance area will have a new cloakroom and a new enlarged bookshop. An adjacent ground-level space will be created for openings and events, and will open onto a newly created Australian garden. It will be a space that can be commercially hired out when not required for Gallery functions and, if necessary, can be divided into three separate spaces.

At the new ground-level entrance there will be a specifically created area for the 1988 *Aboriginal Memorial*, one of the most important works in the collection. Appropriately, this impressive sculptural installation, a major work of art, will be the first that visitors see as they enter the National Gallery. It will be displayed in a way that relates to the outside landscaping.

In new construction, immediately above the new entrance and its facilities, there will be specially created galleries for Indigenous Australian art; they will connect to the existing galleries on the main level. Each of these new galleries will be designed to accommodate the needs of specific types of Indigenous Australian art, with areas for small early dot paintings, large galleries for larger dot paintings, spaces for bark paintings, and for Hermannsburg watercolours, Indigenous textiles, prints, ceramics and sculptures. The main Indigenous Art galleries will be sky-lit, apart from those areas intended for the display of light-sensitive works such as textiles, baskets and watercolours. These will be the first galleries in Australia designed around the specific needs of displaying different aspects of Indigenous Australian art.

The famous Ned Kelly series by Sidney Nolan, arguably the Gallery's most popular Australian work, will be brought downstairs to the main level and given a special room at a location currently occupied by a lobby area and the Gallery Shop. The Kelly paintings will be among the first works seen on the principal display floor. Existing shop and cloakroom spaces will be converted to small spaces for the decorative arts and on the opposite side of the hallway from the Kelly paintings, a space is reserved for displaying works from the photographic collection.



- Asian Art Stage 1 & 2
- International Art
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art - Stage 1
- Nolan's Ned Kelly series Stage 1
- Special Exhibitions Stage 2
- Australian Art Stage 2
- Childrens Gallery Stage 2
- Pacific Art Stage 2

Stage 1 & Stage 2 - Ground floor proposed extension & collection location

However, with the current Gallery building — apart from the lack of a noticeable entrance, and the fact that the collection has long outgrown the building — ***the overwhelming conceptual problem is that Australian Art is relegated to secondary status.***

Australian art is confined to the low-ceilinged ‘attic’ space upstairs. The area is too small to show either the full richness of our culture or our existing extensive collection. The inaccessibility, in the present building, of Australia’s own visual culture — and its placement in an unattractive corridor-like space — could be seen as the ultimate cultural cringe.

Some visitors never find the present upstairs galleries containing Australian Art. The National Gallery of Australia should display Australian visual culture much more accessibly, attractively and expansively.

Stage One of the building program will do this for Indigenous Australian Art. Stage Two will similarly redisplay the rest of Australian and Australasian Art.

Building Additions Stage Two.

Australian Art (non-Indigenous)

In Stage Two of the building program, completely new galleries for Australian art should be created in a new wing built to encircle the present temporary-exhibitions galleries. Australian Art should be brought downstairs from the ‘attic’ to occupy this large area of its own on the main level, the ‘piano nobile’ floor. These new Australian galleries should be illuminated from above with sunlight, the same light by which most of the works were created.

The future Stage Two galleries for Australian art should connect to the new galleries for Indigenous Australian art that are part of Stage One. Indigenous art, appropriately, will be encountered first. Chronologically-arranged galleries will proceed from the colonial period onwards. Preceding colonial art there should be an introductory gallery showing eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century European art in the Pacific. All the galleries should be designed for the specific scale of differing kinds of Australian art. For example, there should be spacious galleries with high ceilings for large Edwardian figure paintings and Federation landscapes; there should be smaller, lower-ceilinged galleries for modernist pictures of the 1920s and ’30s; larger galleries again for



Ramingining Artists
The Aboriginal Memorial 1987-88
Ramingining, Central Arnhem Land
Wood and natural pigments
Purchased with the assistance of admission charges, commissioned in 1987

neoclassical figure paintings and sculptures of the same period but then smaller galleries for Australian modernism of the 1940s. Large high spaces will be designed to accommodate the diverse forms of contemporary Australian art.

Adjacent to the main chronologically arranged day-lit galleries there should be small side galleries, with lower ceilings and without natural light, for light-sensitive works on paper — watercolours, drawings, prints and photographs — and also for textiles. Such galleries are especially important for the periods of Australian art when works on paper (e.g. early colonial watercolours) are artistically stronger and more numerous than oil paintings. The National Gallery of Australia has the finest and largest collection of Australian works of art on paper. Some side galleries should also concentrate on Australian design and decorative arts.

The Australian galleries should be planned to incorporate exceptional works in the collection such as Napier Waller's large mural design *I'll put a Girdle round about the Earth* (which currently cannot be displayed) and John Olsen's major painting *Sydney sun* installed as it was intended — as a ceiling.

Furthermore, the Gallery's proposed new wing for Australian art should be used to attract major private collections. With new spaces the National Gallery of Australia can offer donors naming rights to certain galleries. There exist private collections that could significantly help complete aspects of the National Collection of Australian Art.

Galleries in the future Australian Art wing also provide an opportunity for offering naming rights to prospective donors of cash to Australian art.

Displaying Asian Art. Stage One

Asian Art, too, will be brought to the piano nobile floor, in this case up, from the lower-level Gallery 9 to main-level Galleries 11 and 12 (and in Stage Two also add Gallery 8, the current Orde Poynton Gallery). We should focus on sympathetic displays of mixed media (sculptures, paintings and textiles) beginning with Indian Hindu, Jain and Buddhist art. The redisplay of the Indian art collection will be completed in August 2006 and Indian Islamic art will link with Southeast Asian Islamic art. Southeast Asian Ancestral and Animist art, and other arts of Southeast Asia, will also link into the Indian display.



Kota school Rajasthan, India
Temple hanging [pichavai] c. 1840
opaque watercolour, gold and silver on cotton
Purchased 2005

Each major Asian sculpture will have its own custom-made pedestal of concrete in keeping with the concrete architecture of the National Gallery building.

Chinese and Japanese art, Middle Eastern Islamic art and other Central Asian arts will remain where they are in the lower-level Gallery 10, connected by the two ramps to the rest of Asian art on the main level above.

Displaying Pacific Arts. Stage Two

A special large gallery should be created in the future Stage Two for traditional art of the Pacific Islands, including the Maori art of New Zealand, the traditional Melanesian art of New Guinea, New Caledonia, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, and the Polynesian art of Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Hawaii etc. The works will be shown as art and not anthropology. This display should be connected to a large gallery devoted to contemporary art of Asia and the Pacific.

These galleries for the Pacific Arts should be strategically placed towards the end of the future Australian wing, in proximity to contemporary Australian art, reflecting their geography in relation to Australia.

This great attention to the Pacific past and present has never been attempted before in any art museum in Australia — or indeed elsewhere. It is a major new initiative and must be seen as very significant for our region.

In summing up, for art-political reasons and ease of access, the art of all the major cultures should have a significant presence on the same accessible main-level floor: the piano nobile. And Stage Two should also be designed in a way that allows much better circulation than the present building.

Sculpture Gallery. Stage One

Gallery 9, where the main Asian display is currently located, will return to being a sculpture gallery. When the building opened in 1982 most visitors and museum professionals agreed this was the one gallery that really worked. Indeed it was strikingly successful, centred upon the exquisite Brancusi *Birds in space* which will return to the Sculpture Gallery. Sculptures representing all cultures could be redisplayed in this beautiful gallery.

Open study storage. Stage Two

Beneath the main-level galleries for future display of Australian art, open study-storage galleries should be created for Australian art. Study storage is where very dense and unaesthetically arranged displays are accessible to the general public, either all the time or on selected days each week. Study storage is becoming common in America — for example the American Decorative Arts display at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art — and exists for Old Master paintings at the National Gallery, London, yet it has never been incorporated successfully into an art museum in Australia. It would help relieve the Gallery's acute storage problem and make the Australian collections (other than light-sensitive textiles and works on paper) completely accessible to the public.

The Research Library and the Collection-Study Rooms. Stage Two

The National Gallery's Research Library is the most important art library in Australia. The ground-level space beneath the future galleries for Australian Art should be used not only for open study-storage but also to create an expanded library with easier access from outside for visiting researchers and scholars. Adjacent to the library should be collection-study rooms and storage for our huge collection of Australian works on paper, which is stored in solander boxes. Adjacent to this area could be a similar study arrangement for textiles, especially the major Southeast Asian textile collection.

The much enlarged Australian displays and, on the ground level below them, the Open Study Storage, the Collection-Study Rooms and the Research Library together will form a unique and important Centre for Australian Art. Such a Centre should eventually establish formal links with Canberra's Australian National University.

Office space. Stage Two

The present library space could be easily converted into much needed expansion and consolidation of office space.

Works on Paper and Textile Displays: upstairs galleries. Stage Two

The National Gallery holds more works on paper than any other art museum in Australia. This includes the largest collections of International and Australian photographs, twentieth-century American prints, nineteenth- and twentieth-century European prints, and Australian prints and drawings. The Gallery also holds Australia's largest collection of Asian textiles. The upstairs galleries, currently used to display Australian art, may not be suitable, with their smaller spaces, lower ceilings and lack of natural daylight, for displaying Australian paintings and sculptures but they are ideal for a series of galleries in which to install changing displays of photographs, European prints and American prints. The series could also accommodate a special gallery for Indian and, particularly, Indonesian textiles. A new Orde Poynton Gallery (or several Orde Poynton Galleries) could be created for works on paper. A small gallery for late-nineteenth-, twentieth- and twenty-first-century design could also be established on this upper level.

Galleries such as these will be significant and unique in Australia, particularly for visitors who enjoy studying intense displays of such material.

International Contemporary Art. Stage Two

The one high-ceilinged space on the upstairs level, Gallery 7, currently used for contemporary Australian art, could be used for the most recent International Art, and include Australian contemporary art.

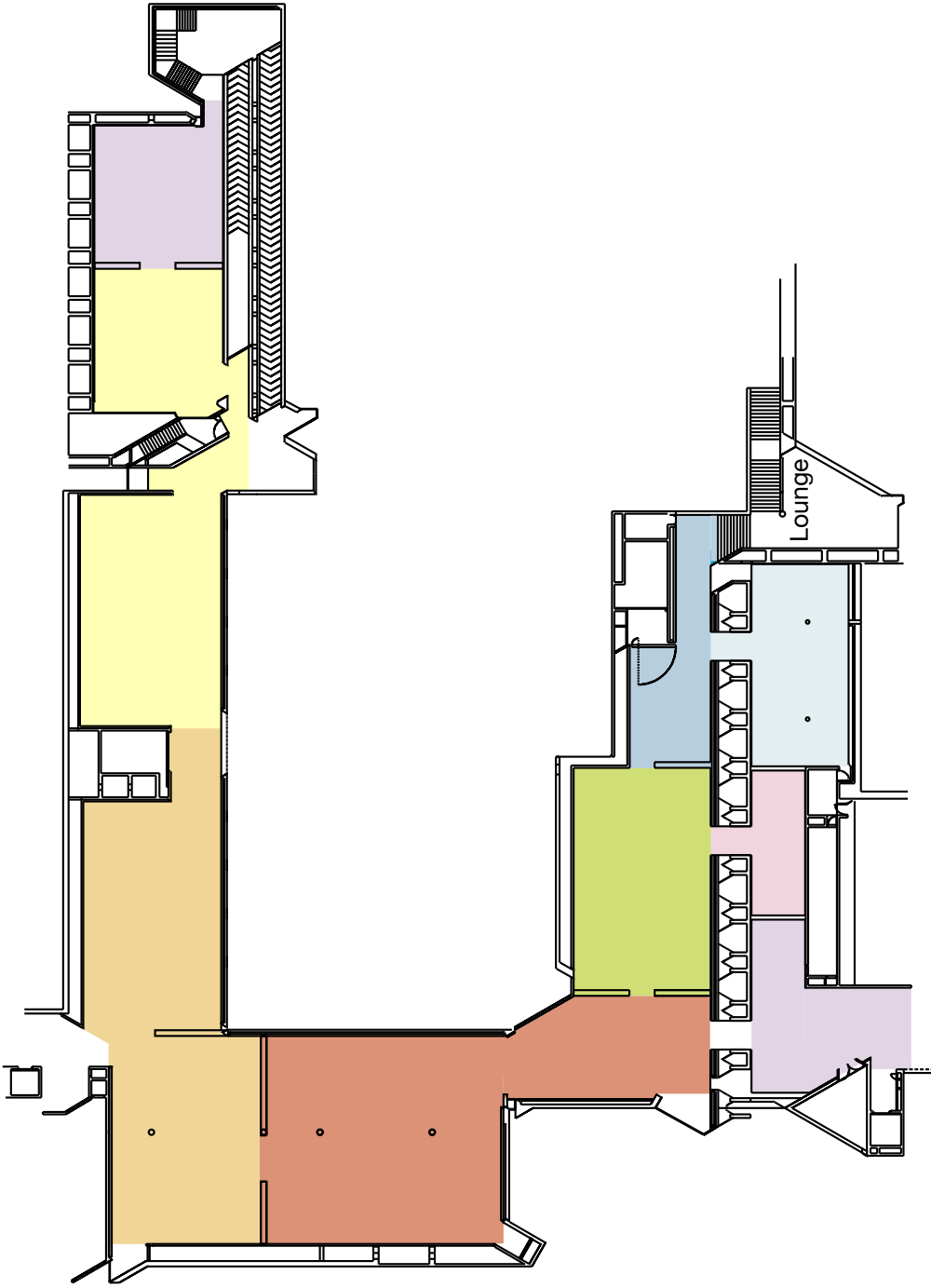
Redisplays of Current International Galleries. Stage One

In the current International display, the walls have been clad with white-painted plasterboard in a desire to make the building more sympathetic for the works of art, covering the concrete-aggregate walls that were so unsympathetic for paintings. Whereas the works of art now look better, the interior look of the building has changed from what was described as a "concrete bunker" to something worse, an insubstantial white "cardboard box". The internal architectural integrity of the building has been compromised.

A solution must be found not only to honour the integrity of the original building interior but also, at the same time, to be sympathetic to the works of art.

It will require the use of naturally textured and carefully coloured wall cladding and temporary partition walls which complement the concrete structure.

The Gallery curators and designers are currently working with me on a solution.



- Indian Trade textiles
- Indonesian textiles
- Orde Poynton Gallery European Prints
- International Illustrated books
- American Prints
- Decorative Arts and Design
- Photography Galleries 19th c., 20th c. & 21st c.
- Recent Contemporary International Art and Australian Art acquisitions

Stage 2 - proposed display level 1 (currently Australian art galleries)

Furthermore, newly planned International and Asian Art collection displays in the current building will attempt to integrate, where possible, prints, drawings, textiles and decorative arts into the displays of paintings and sculptures. This has always been done, with varying degrees of success, in the awkward upstairs Australian galleries.

Importantly, highlights of Australian art should be included in the International displays. Australian art must be seen in an international context as well as in a comprehensive national display. In the past this has been done occasionally, but must be done more consistently, particularly where Australian artists can be favourably compared with their international peers.

(In the current upstairs Australian display, wall colours have already been very recently changed and a new display of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century art, including many very recent acquisitions, has just been completed.)

More radical changes to the newly integrated International displays will be finished within the next twelve months, after the *Aboriginal Memorial* is moved from its present location in Gallery 1, temporarily to Gallery 9, the past and future Sculpture Gallery, before being permanently relocated to the new ground-level entrance area of the Stage One extensions.

Relighting

The gallery's collection-display spaces also need to be completely relit. There are too many areas of gloominess. The lighting system is antiquated; lighting fixtures have become unsightly and inconsistent. The lighting is not only inadequate and inflexible but the systems are highly unattractive. We need to engage experienced international lighting experts who can undertake this major expensive, but necessary, task.



Chola dynasty (9th–13th century)
Tamil Nadu, India
The child-saint Sambander 12th century
bronze
Purchased 2005

Exhibitions

Temporary exhibitions keep the public and the media vitally interested in the National Gallery. Special exhibitions provide in-depth access to artists, periods or themes and they provide audiences with new insights not readily available in the permanent collections. They also provide a focus for associated public programs. The Gallery's exhibition program should complement the collections. On the one hand exhibitions should parallel the strengths of the Gallery's collections and, on the other, bring in kinds of art absent from the collections.

In Stage Two of the building alterations we plan to increase the temporary-exhibitions area so that a new space for our smaller collection-based exhibition projects could be adjacent to the main exhibition space. The present Project Gallery is, unfortunately, the furthest space from the entrance to the building.

The Gallery should stage at least one fine blockbuster exhibition every year to bring in large numbers of visitors and generate income to maintain the exhibition program. There should be an attempt to make various middle-sized shows largely pay for themselves. And we should also undertake more esoteric shows, which may not necessarily be popular with audiences, and therefore need to be highly subsidised, but which stretch one's knowledge, imagination and understanding.

In the exhibition program over a period of years there should be balance between traditional and contemporary art, and between European, Asian, Pacific and Australian art. The program should also include exhibitions containing different media, not just painting but sculpture, photographic media, prints, drawings and the decorative arts. The National Gallery has a particular role in developing and displaying imaginative exhibitions of Australian artists, movements or periods that may have been neglected.

We could also help smaller art museums by becoming a partner in presenting shows of their nationally significant local artists.

A great many publicly-funded exhibition spaces for contemporary art are to be found throughout the nation and also in Canberra. Even so the National Gallery should include contemporary projects in its program. Such projects help develop audiences that might never find their way to their local contemporary art spaces, and they can contextualise difficult new art for inexperienced audiences. But this should never be a main thrust of the program; the National Gallery should not compete with or threaten the role of Australia's contemporary art spaces and museums of contemporary art.

Unfortunately, organising exhibitions (especially blockbusters) has effectively become three times more costly in the past six years or so. We should therefore look at doing no more than three or four shows per year in the major temporary-exhibitions galleries, and avoid the practice of removing the permanent collection to accommodate temporary exhibitions. We will continue to produce high-quality low-cost exhibitions from our rich collections for the Project Gallery, the Orde Poynton Gallery and the Children's Gallery.

It should go without saying that the National Gallery must also continue its excellent program of touring exhibitions around Australia and — after the success of the Out & About program — by continuing to release small focus displays drawn from the National Collection. The ongoing travelling-exhibitions program is an important way to share the collections with the nation.

Children's Gallery. Stage Two

A new and larger children's gallery should be established in the Stage Two construction. The present children's gallery is very popular but far too small for school groups. This future gallery should be placed adjacent to the other temporary-exhibitions galleries.

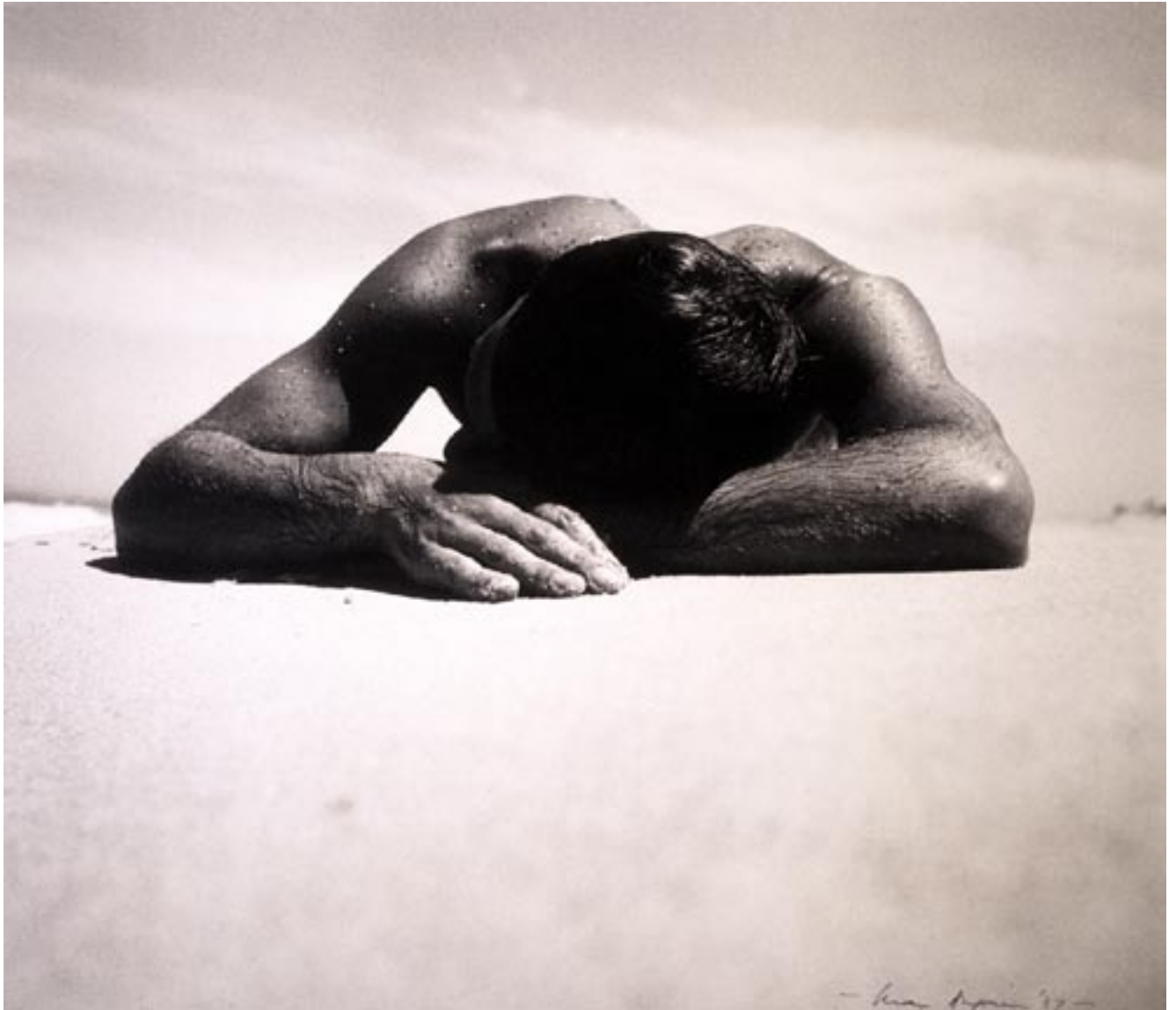
Publishing the collections

Art museums should publish or perish. Since the National Gallery is located in Canberra, a city with a population of about 350,000 (and only the sixth-largest city in Australia), publishing allows the Gallery to extend its audiences both nationally and internationally. The curators, and others, must be encouraged and given every opportunity to research the collections and related material, and publish the results.

A great National Gallery must contain in-house scholarship in order to maintain its international credibility. We must of course fulfil the expectation that we should be the world's principal centre of scholarship in Australian art. At present we are also a world centre for scholarship in Indonesian textiles.

The Collection should be published electronically as well as in books and catalogues. The Gallery should aim to make all works in all collections available online in both images and texts. Much has been done already to make them digitally accessible to all Australians and to promote the collections worldwide. The online collections will assist in disseminating information with which to educate and whet a very large public appetite for the treasures we hold in trust for the nation.

At the same time we must continue to publish books on artists, collections and collecting areas of artistic and cultural significance. The scholarship should be of the highest quality, and so should the design and production.



Max Dupain 1911-92
Sunbaker 1973 printed c.1980
Gelatin silver photograph
Gift of the Phillip Morris Arts Grant 1982



Cover image
Sidney Nolan 1917-92
Ned Kelly (detail) 1946
Enamel on composition board
Gift of Sunday Reed 1977