

nga

National Gallery of Australia
Acquisitions Policy



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JW Lindt

Coontajandra and Sanginguble, Central Australian Aboriginals

1891–92

carbon print

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased 2005

Introduction

The National Gallery of Australia holds collections that are still newly formed. When the building opened in Canberra in 1982 there had been only ten years of serious collecting in preparation for the opening.

A new collection cannot even hope to eventually cover most areas and periods of world art, as do many long-established overseas national museums of art. Furthermore, except in Australian art, the National Gallery of Australia cannot, and should not, compete in all the same collecting areas as Australia's state art museums, all founded well over a hundred years ago.

Twenty-five years on from our opening, this revised collecting policy takes account of substantially increased prices for late nineteenth- and twentieth-century international art. Additions to this major area of the collection will necessarily be limited.

However, this 2006 document does not differ greatly from past statements of policy. The National Gallery of Australia's founding document is the 1966 'Lindsay Report' from the National Art Gallery Committee of Inquiry commissioned by Prime Minister Menzies. That report, mindful of other Australian state collections, placed its greatest emphasis on:

- modern art worldwide
- the whole of Australian art
- 'works of art representing the high cultural achievement of Australia's neighbours in southern and eastern Asia and the Pacific Islands'.



Henri Matisse

Costume for a mourner 1920

cotton/wool (felt), cotton/silk (velvet), sized cotton, steel wire, cotton (lining)

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 1973

© Henri Matisse, Licensed by VISCOPY, Australia 2006

Similarly the 1994 acquisitions policy – the most carefully considered such document published by the Gallery’s Council – also emphasised Australasian (that is, Pacific) art.

This acquisitions policy is therefore a reaffirmation of past Council policies. It follows on from the Director’s Vision Statement released on 12 October 2005, the National Gallery of Australia’s 23rd birthday.

In brief, this policy focuses upon filling major gaps in the Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Pacific and Asian collections, and in the modern European and American collections, with works of outstanding aesthetic quality. It is a policy that builds on the existing strengths of the national collection of art.

All major acquisitions are intended for the Gallery’s permanent collection displays and the Gallery’s touring or non-touring temporary exhibitions. They can also be lent to other art museum’s temporary exhibitions, particularly within Australia but also abroad.



Arthur Streeton

The selectors hut [Whelan on the log] 1890

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased 1961

Australian Art

The National Gallery of Australia should present all kinds of Australian visual art in considerable depth. Visual arts are arguably Australia's strongest art form. Australia's national collection should therefore represent Australian art extremely well.

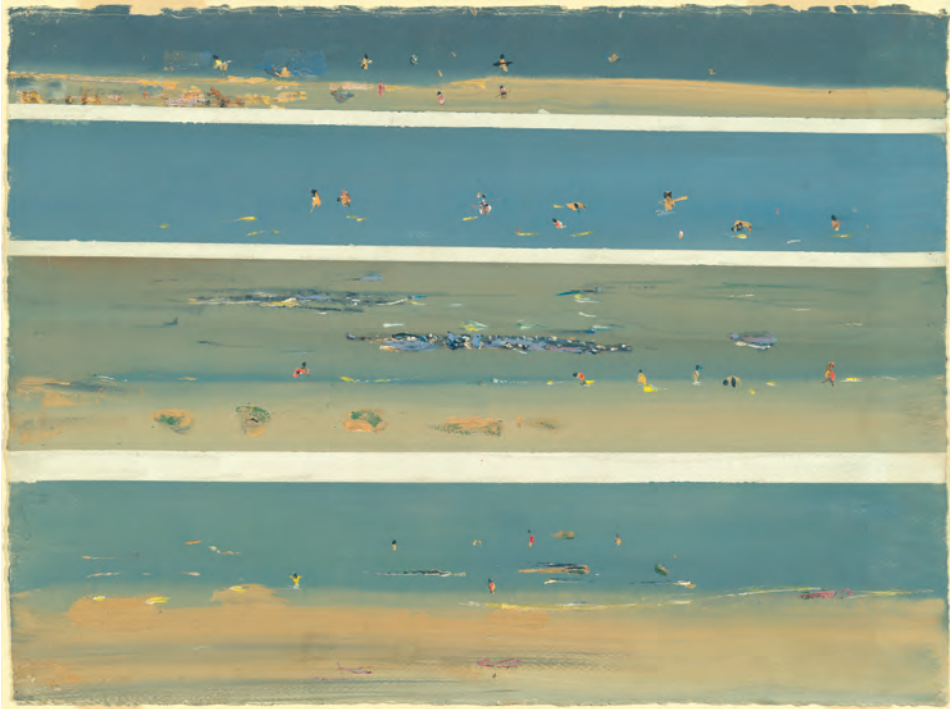
The Australian collection not only covers art made in Australia but also embraces Australia-related art made elsewhere. Art from around the time of European settlement in 1788 is the present starting point, but earlier Indigenous works would be desirable. (Indigenous peoples' art is discussed here separately.) The Australian collection also includes art that records early European exploration of, and encounters with, the Pacific.

Our acquisitions of Australian art will continue to be directed towards building a collection of outstanding aesthetic merit in all media and in all approaches, and towards presenting a fully chronological survey from all periods and from all states, territories and regions. In collecting Australian art we will continue to include a broad range of work by living artists.

Australian art media encompass paintings and sculptures; prints, posters and illustrated books; drawings and sketchbooks; photographs and other photomedia; and decorative arts and design.

New Zealand is geographically, historically and nationally close to Australia. The art of New Zealand's Pakeha (settlers) will be collected selectively, to represent major twentieth- and twenty-first-century New Zealand artists.

The arts of the Indigenous peoples of Australia and New Zealand are discussed separately in the following sections.



Fred Williams

Beachscape with bathers, Queenscliff 1971

gouache on paper

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased from Gallery admission charges 1983

© Fred Williams Estate



Fred Williams

Beachscape with bathers, Queenscliff 1971

gouache on paper

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased from Gallery admission charges 1983

© Fred Williams Estate



Torres Strait Islander people
Unknown maker
Mask 19th century
wood, shell, resin, human hair, fibre string, white pigment
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2006

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works of art are products of the world's oldest continuous surviving culture. The culture has produced a distinctive and innovative visual expression.

The National Gallery of Australia aims to represent Australia's Indigenous artistic expression across all regions, styles, media and themes. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collection already includes significant works in a variety of media from all major Indigenous art-making regions and communities throughout Australia. Its great strength is an in-depth collection from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – the largest existing collection of this material. The handful of works from the nineteenth century will be added to selectively.

The policy for acquiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is to further develop the present considerable strengths of the collection, especially by seeking works that are of national and international significance. The Gallery will keep abreast of contemporary developments across all traditions, styles and media.

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is sacred and restricted. The Gallery collects only works either intended for public display or approved for display in consultation with appropriate Indigenous representatives and communities.



Rover Thomas [Joolama]

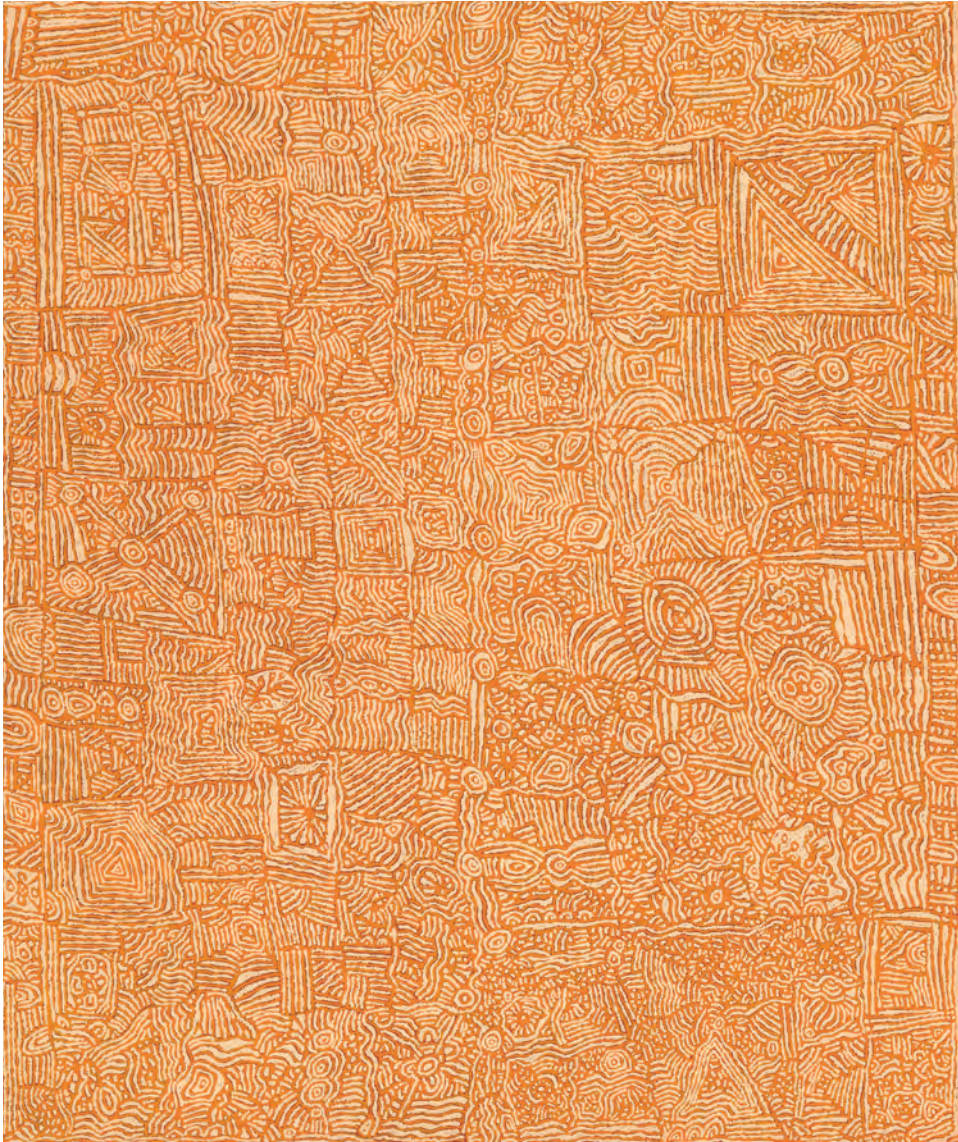
Kukatja/Wangkajunga people

Cyclone Tracy 1991

natural pigments on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 1991

Reproduced courtesy of Warmun Art Centre



Lorna Brown Napanangka

Pintupi/Luritja people, Napanangka skin

Grandfather's country at Warren Creek 2005

Papunya, Northern Territory

synthetic polymer paint on linen

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Gift of Rupert and Annabel Myer in honour of his parents Sarah and Baillieu Myer

© the artist, Licensed by Aboriginal Artists Agency, 2006



Solomon Islands, Owa-Raha (Santa Ana)
Post from ceremonial house c. 1900
wood
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2006

Pacific Arts

The National Gallery of Australia will add to the existing small but high-quality collection of Indigenous art – past and present – of our nearest Pacific neighbours: New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and New Guinea.

Future acquisitions will therefore include the traditional Polynesian Maori art of New Zealand; the traditional Melanesian art of New Guinea (both West Papua and Papua New Guinea), the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia and Vanuatu; the traditional Polynesian art of the Pacific Islands or island nations such as Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, the Cook Islands, Rapa Nui, the Marquesas Islands, Tahiti and Hawaii; and the traditional art of the islands of Micronesia.

Contemporary art of the Pacific region will also be collected, including printmaking and photography.



Papua New Guinea
The Ambum stone c. 1500 BCE
greywacke stone
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 1977



Raharuhi Rukupo

Ancestral image house support [*poutokomanawa*] c. 1840
wood, ochre, patina

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 1981



Gandharan region, Afghanistan or Pakistan
Standing bodhisattva Kushan period 3rd–4th century
schist stone
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2006

Asian Art

The National Gallery of Australia will give priority to acquiring works of art from those Asian regions geographically closest to Australia, notably Indonesia and the other Southeast Asian countries of Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, East Timor, the Philippines and Myanmar (Burma). Priority will also be given to the art of the Indian subcontinent, especially from India, but also from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

In these primary collecting areas of India and Southeast Asia, the Gallery aims to build outstanding collections. For example, we aim to have the finest collection in our region of Indian art outside India, the finest collection in our region of Thai art outside Thailand, and the finest collection in our region of Indonesian art outside Indonesia.

While focusing chiefly on the Gallery's existing strengths of South and Southeast Asian textiles and sculptures, we will seek varied and historically significant forms and styles to provide, in the long term, a comprehensive and exciting introduction to the arts of Southeast Asia, both mainland and archipelago, and to the arts of the wider Indian subcontinent.

Modern and contemporary works from the South and Southeast Asian region will also be sought, following the same guidelines as those applied to contemporary European and American art. The Gallery aims to develop a collection of photography from the Asia–Pacific region from the nineteenth century onwards.



India
Open-worked pierced screen [jali] c. 1630–1650
red sandstone
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2005



Indonesia
The bronze weaver 6th century
bronze
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2006



Malay people

Palembang, south Sumatra, Indonesia

Ceremonial covering 19th century

silk, gold thread, sequins; embroidery, appliqué

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Acquired through gift and purchase from the Collection of Robert J Holgren and Anita Spertus, New York, 2000

In addition to providing the general public with a coherent introduction to the history of Asian art, the Gallery will strengthen the collection with key works from the entire Asian region. Works from more distant Asian countries – China, Japan, Korea and the countries of Central Asia and the Middle East – will be sought selectively. They will be major works in their own right, but some will especially extend our representations of ideas and belief systems that influenced the region's various arts. Some will demonstrate artistic interchange and influences between East Asia and the Islamic world (and the West) and the arts of Southeast Asia and India.



Kasimir Malevich

Stroyuschiy dom [*House under construction*] 1915–16
oil on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 1974

European and American Art

The National Gallery of Australia's collections of European and American art are intended to parallel the history of Australian art over the past 200 years, with emphasis on the past 100 years. Consequently, they are distinctly modern in character. The Gallery will continue to acquire works that build on and enhance this profile.

The significant strengths of the European and American collections lie in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European collections and the excellent collection of American art from the mid-twentieth century onwards. The Gallery has some of the finest examples in Australia of French Impressionism, School of Paris, Dada and Surrealism, the Russian avant-garde, Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Minimalism and Conceptual Art. The Gallery aims to build on the considerable strengths of these collections, which are unique in Australia.

The modern and contemporary European and American collections encompass all media: paintings, sculpture, drawings, decorative arts and design, prints, posters, illustrated books, and a near-complete representation of the history of photography.

While the current painting and sculpture collections are comparatively small, they mainly consist of high-quality, iconic works. The collections of works on paper and decorative arts aim to represent both the high points of individual achievement and the history of their respective media.



Mark Rothko

Brown, black on maroon 1957

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 1981

© Mark Rothko, Licensed by VISCOPY, Australia 2006



Joan Miró

Paysage [Landscape] 1927

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 1983

© Joan Miró, Licensed by VISCOPY, Australia 2006



Willem de Kooning

Woman V 1952–53

oil and charcoal on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 1974

© Willem de Kooning, Licensed by VISCOPY, Australia 2006

In addition, many stylistic movements are more easily represented in this area than by works from the now often prohibitively expensive territories of painting and sculpture.

The Gallery's sculpture garden is world-class and will be extended with the addition of new works of outstanding quality.

As noted in the introduction, the National Gallery of Australia's collecting activities can no longer hope to cover a near-complete range of world art, either geographically or in historical depth. The Gallery will no longer give priority to three small but excellent Indigenous art collections from Africa, Mesoamerica (formerly known as Pre-Columbian) and North America, or to the small, unrepresentative European Old Master collection, which contains works from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. These four dormant collections contain many fine works and will be held in trust for Australia. The African and North American Indigenous holdings, the only such high-quality public art collections in Australia, should be added to only by occasional gift. The Gallery's small European Old Master collection should also be added to only by gift.

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Jackson Pollock

Blue poles 1952 (detail)

enamel and aluminium paint with glass on canvas

National Gallery of Australia Purchased 1973

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