

Highlights of the University of Melbourne Art Collection

This exhibition indicates the extraordinary breadth of the University of Melbourne Art Collection. The art collection comprises approximately 15,000 works of art and artefacts collected throughout the university's 150-year history that bridge sixth millennium BCE Egypt and twenty-first century Australia.

The University of Melbourne Art Collection encompasses a suite of collections that range from classical antiquities and international indigenous material culture to painting, sculpture and works on paper by major Australian artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as current practitioners. The collection has been shaped by many individuals throughout the university's history, and reflects the teaching activities of departments and the personal tastes of benefactors.

The artworks displayed in the Grimwade Gallery profile four of the university's key art collections: the Rupert Bunny Collection, the Leonhard Adam Collection of International Indigenous Culture, the Ewing Collection, and the Gerard Herbst Poster Collection. Presented in the adjacent annex gallery are new acquisitions of paintings and photographs by contemporary Australian artists Leonard Brown, Destiny Deacon, David Jolly and Peter Tyndall.

Australian artist Rupert Bunny is known for his large-scale Victorian idylls and colourful decorative allegories. Included here is a group of late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century monoprints and drawings that are part of a vast study collection gifted to the university in 1948 by the artist's estate. The Rupert Bunny Collection comprises 21 drawing and sketch-books and over 700 oil, watercolour, pen, crayon and pencil sketches that were in the artist's studio at the time of his death in 1947. This initial gift has since been augmented with major purchases and donations. Particularly special are the figure sketches and preliminary studies which enable valuable insights into Bunny's working methods.

A selection of Groote Eylandt bark paintings and Melanesian carved wooden paddles from the Leonard Adam Collection of International Indigenous Culture demonstrate the opportunities the University of Melbourne Art Collection offers for in-depth analysis of material culture from discrete geographical regions. Dr Leonhard Adam, an internationally renowned ethnologist and lecturer in the university's history department from 1942 to 1957, established the collection in the early 1940s to aid with his teaching. The collection was bequeathed to the university in 1960 and comprises over 1500 items from Oceania, Asia, America and Africa.

The Ewing Collection and the Gerard Herbst Poster Collection reflect the individual taste and vision of collectors who later became generous benefactors. The Ewing Collection was donated to the University of Melbourne Union in 1938 by Dr Samuel Arthur Ewing with his declared hope that 'our youth may be inspired with the beauty as well as a deeper love of the country by the works of our artists'. Comprising paintings, watercolours, drawings and prints by Australian artists, the collection has strong associations with Melbourne's cultural activities in the early decades of the twentieth century; many artists studied at the National Gallery School and were exhibiting members of the Victorian Artists Society.

The Gerard Herbst Poster Collection contains over 2000 posters representing international design practice from the past four decades. It provides an overview of contemporary poster design in Europe, with a smaller amount of material from the United States, Japan, Asia and Australia. The collection was formed from the 1970s to 1996 when it was donated to the university by Gerard Herbst, a former lecturer and head of industrial design at RMIT University. The intention of the gift was to provide audiences with the opportunity to learn from examples of excellence in design, and to encourage a continuation of the skills involved in artistic poster creation.