



## MEDIA RELEASE

### NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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## WHO ARE YOU: Australian Portraiture

The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia | 25 March to 21 August 2022 | FREE



**24 November 2021:** *WHO ARE YOU: Australian Portraiture* is one of the most comprehensive explorations of portraiture ever mounted in Australia and the first exhibition to bring together the collections of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) and the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra. The exhibition will be on display in Melbourne from 25 March to 21 August 2022 and Canberra from 1 October 2022 to 29 January 2023.

Revealing the rich artistic synergies and contrasts between the two institutions' collections, this co-curated exhibition considers portraiture in Australia across time and media, as well as the role of the portraiture genre in the development of a sense of Australian national identity.

Featuring more than two-hundred works by Australian artists including Patricia Piccinini, Atong Atem, Howard Arkley, Vincent Namatjira and Tracey Moffatt, and featuring sitters including Cate Blanchett, Albert Namatjira, Queen Elizabeth II, Eddie Mabo and David Gulpilil, the exhibition explores our inner worlds and outer selves, as well as issues of sociability, intimacy, isolation, celebrity and ordinariness.

The exhibition also questions what actually constitutes portraiture by examining the surprising and sometimes unconventional ways of representing likeness, such as the abstract self-portrait by John Nixon and Boris Cipusev's typographic portrait of Jeff from The Wiggles. Polixeni Papapetrou's *Magma Man*, a photograph which merges sitter and landscape until the two are almost indecipherable, and Shirley Purdie's multi-panelled evocation of biography and Country further challenge the conventions of the genre and touch upon the intimate connection between artist, sitter and land. Alongside these works, iconic self-portraits will also be displayed by artists including John Brack, Nora Heysen and William Yang.

Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV, said: 'This exhibition marks the first major partnership between the NGV and the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra. By combining our respective portraiture collections and curatorial expertise in this area, we have been able to stage the largest thematic portraiture exhibition in the history of either institution. This presentation will no doubt offer audiences an unprecedented insight into the genre and its place in Australian art history.'

Karen Quinlan AM, Director, National Portrait Gallery, said: 'The NPG is thrilled to work with the NGV on this extensive exploration of Australian portraiture. The exhibition comes at a time when, in the current global COVID environment, stories from home, about home, and the artists and identities who have shaped and continue to shape our nation are more compelling and important than ever. It is a privilege to be able to present our collection in conversation with the NGV's and to explore the idea of Australian identity and its many layers and facets through the lens of portraiture.'

Presented across five thematic sections, the exhibition raises challenging and provocative questions about who we are and how we view others – historically, today and into the future. The exhibition opens by considering the connection between people and place, reflecting on the relationship between artists, sitters and the environment, as well as the personification of the natural world. Highlight works include a conceptual map depicting self and Country by Wawiriya Burton, *Ngayaku Ngura (My Country)* 2009, as well as the NGV's recent acquisition *Seven Sisters Song* 2021 by Kaylene Whiskey, a painted road sign that is filled with personally significant, autobiographical references to pop culture.

A further section explores the artistic tradition of the self-portrait and portraits of artists, as well as how this convention has been subverted or challenged by contemporary artists working today. Works include Hari Ho's *Dadang Christanto* 2005, which depicts the artist buried to the neck in sand, referencing the brutal killings of Indonesians in the failed military coup of September 1965, and Alan Constable's *Not titled (Green large format camera)* 2013, personifying the act of photography with a hand modelled, ceramic camera.

Ideas of intimacy and alienation are juxtaposed through images of family and community presented alongside those of vulnerability and isolation. Works include Pat Larter's *Marty* 1995, a graphic collage depicting a male sex worker, challenging the ease with which society consumes images of female nudity, and Naomi Hobson's *Warrior without a weapon* 2019, a photographic series in which the artist challenges stereotypes about Indigenous men from her home community in Coen, by using flowers as a metaphor for male vulnerability.

The exhibition also explores portraiture's surprising capacity to reveal the inner worlds and mindsets of both the sitter and the artist, as exemplified by Eric Thake's satirical vignettes of figures in dream-like settings, and Hoda Afshar's *Remain* 2018, a video exploring Australia's controversial border protection policy and the human rights of those seeking asylum.

The final section of the exhibition interrogates Australian icons, identities and how we construct them. Works featured in this section include Michael Riley's *Maria* 1986 and Polly Borland's *HM Queen Elizabeth II* 2002, two works displayed side by side, drawing connections between archetypal imagery of royalty, with negative renderings of 'otherness' found in historical ethnographic portraiture.

*WHO ARE YOU: Australian Portraiture* is presented by the NGV and the National Portrait Gallery and will be on display at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia at Fed Square from 25 March to 21 August 2022 and the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra from 1 October 2022 to 29 January 2023. For further information, please visit the NGV website:

[NGV.MELBOURNE](http://NGV.MELBOURNE)

*WHO ARE YOU: Australian Portraiture* is generously supported by Major Partner, Deakin University.

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#### Image Captions left - right:

##### John Nixon

*Self Portrait (non-objective composition) (yellow cross)* 1990

enamel paint on plywood

177.6 × 165.0 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of Chase Manhattan Overseas Corporation, Fellow, 1991

© Courtesy of the artist

##### Nora Heysen AM

*Self portrait* 1934

oil on canvas  
60.80 x 53.50 cm (frame)  
43.10 x 36.30 cm (support)  
National Portrait Gallery  
Purchased 1999  
© Lou Klepac

**Rona Panangka Rubuntja**

*I'm black (Nicky Winmar), covered vase* 2015  
earthenware  
(a-b) 53.1 x 24.8 cm diameter (overall)  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2015  
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**Michael Riley**

*Maria* 1986; printed 2013  
from the series *Michael Riley Portraits 1984–1990*  
inkjet print on paper  
41.50 x 43.40 x 5.00 cm (frame)  
39.10 x 40.90 cm (image)  
National Portrait Gallery, Canberra  
Purchased 2013  
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