



MEDIA RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

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Jewellery and Body Adornment from the NGV Collection

NGV International | 27 August 2022 – 12 June 2023 | Free entry



7 July 2022: *Jewellery and Body Adornment from the NGV Collection* – a new display highlighting the NGV’s important and multidisciplinary collection – presents an exquisite selection of works from antiquity to the present day, reflecting the wide variety of making traditions and practices across different material, cultural and geographical contexts. Defined by a relationship with the body, jewellery and body adornment are among the world’s oldest known artforms.

Ranging from the ceremonial and talismanic, to the decorative and conceptual, the display features work composed of dazzling, highly prized materials, such as precious gems, metals and iridescent seashells, as well as unexpected materials, such as hair, plastic and rubber, which challenge conventional thinking of what constitutes jewellery and its significance.

All works have been drawn exclusively from the NGV Collection across multiple areas, including Indigenous Art, Decorative Arts & Antiquities, Australian Art, Asian Art, Fashion and Textiles, and Contemporary Design. Presented across four themes – identity and place, status and aspiration, ceremony and ritual, and values and sentiment – the works in this display provide insight into body adornment as a shared global practice.

Highlights include recent acquisitions to the NGV Collection that have never been on display before, such as Viliama Grakalic’s cloud brooches from the

1990s and New Zealand artist Octavia Cook’s *S.H.A.L.L.O.W.*, 2021, comprised of seven brooches which address questions of value, in particular the use of animal parts in body adornment.

Wedgwood’s powerful *Anti-slavery medallion*, c. 1781, features a shackled figure in black stoneware beneath the inscription “Am I not a man and a brother?”, illustrating the power of body adornment to express personal and political messages. Robert Baines’ tongue-in-cheek *Bracelet with fire car*, 2001, features a gilded silver bracelet encrusted with red plastic toy cars in place of rubies, and calls into question notions of status and aspiration.

Also on display is Trawlwoolway artist Lola Greeno’s delicate *Mapili rina* necklace comprising multiple strings of lustrous green maireener shells collected from the waters around Flinders and Cape Barren islands off the north-east coast of Tasmania. Greeno’s shell necklaces represent an art form passed down through generations and speak directly to place while drawing attention to environmental change that threatens the fragile natural ecosystem where these shells are found.

A sixteenth-century Ottoman Turkish archer’s ring made from ivory, gold, ruby and emerald also features. The thumb ring is an example of the pointed Islamic style that was used by bowmen to help draw the bow and protect them from the bowstring. A further highlight is a shell bracelet fashioned by Mixtec craftspeople from Oaxaca, Mexico. Rich with symbolic meaning, shell was highly valued by Mesoamerican cultures and was beautifully fashioned by Mixtec artisans into fine jewellery and mosaics.

Exploring the sentimental and emotional capacity of jewellery and body adornment, the display features examples of mourning jewellery, including an 18th century English painted pendant, the reverse of which is ornamented with human hair from the deceased. Also on display is a headdress by renowned Walpiri artist, Yulyurlu Lorna Naparrurla Fencer, which is adorned with painted pendants that represent women’s body paint designs for bush yam ceremonies.

Tony Ellwood AM, Director of the NGV, said: ‘Body adornment is one of the earliest forms of human expression that continues to this very day. This display highlights the power of jewellery to communicate ideas about its wearer, including status, emotions and even desires. Curated by a multidisciplinary team of curators, this display emphasises a rarely-examined strength of the NGV Collection.’

Jewellery and Body Adornment from the NGV Collection will be on display from 27 August 2022 – 12 June 2023 at NGV International, St Kilda Road, Melbourne. Free entry. Further information is available via the NGV website: NGV.MELBOURNE

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IMAGES: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/k7xmilq4k9qmt7g/AACS4SpD34J378v_MwNhdkrha?dl=0

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Image credit:

Peter Tully

Love me tender, necklace 1977

plastic, paste, opaque synthetic polymer resin, mirror, enamel paint on colour offset lithograph

38.4 x 14.0 x 1.4 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, 1978

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