



Fred Williams: The London Drawings

The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia | 21 October 2022 – 29 January 2023 | Free entry



15 August 2022: *Fred Williams: The London Drawings* is the first exhibition dedicated to Williams's London period (1952–56). The exhibition explores the range and power of Williams's drawings from this formative period through some 160 drawings of extraordinary calligraphic energy. These include superb series of works that Williams made in London's music halls, at the zoo, on the city streets, and in formal life drawing classes.

Presenting a surprising counterpoint to the artist's celebrated, abstracted landscape paintings, these drawings reveal Williams's early aspirations to be a figure painter. This early commitment to drawing and painting the human figure is less well known to the public and reveals Williams's extraordinary observational skills and ability to capture the world around him.

Williams left Melbourne for London in December 1951 and there he turned to observing people in particular: performers at the music halls; workers going about their business; passers-by in the streets; models in life classes at the Chelsea Polytechnic; and artist friends and fellow students.

The most important group of works is the large sequence of London's music halls, which were places of popular entertainment frequented by the working and middle classes. Williams sketched the performers on stage: jugglers, acrobats, vaudeville performers, singers and dancers, including such legendary performers as Max Miller and others. Characterised by a dynamic energy and graphic economy, these drawings capture the actions, gestures and expressions of the performers. Williams was also interested in the audience and their reactions, with numerous drawings focussing on the absorbed spectators. These range from amusing caricatures to sensitive studies of audience members dimly illuminated in the gloom of the auditorium.

A further highlight is a group of drawings completed at London Zoo. These large sequences of drawings show Williams's skill in dealing with the forms of exotic creatures – big cats, elephants and giraffes – and in drawing moving subjects. The drawings were usually drawn in red or black conte crayon, and Williams sometimes added wash back in his rooms to further accentuate or define details.

The works on display offer a fascinating insight into both post-war London and the artistic processes of one of Australia's most significant artists, who often used his drawings as the basis for works in other media, including oils, gouache, and etching. In addition to the 160 drawings, twelve gouaches and thirty etchings are included in the exhibition and reveal how the artist explored the same motifs across different media.

A recent gift of more than 600 early drawings by the artist from Lyn Williams AM and Family further strengthens the NGV's internationally significant holdings of works on paper by Fred Williams, which comprise nearly 1,500 impressions of the artist's prints, 286 etching plates and some 120 later gouaches, drawings and watercolours.

Tony Ellwood AM, Director of the NGV, said: 'Fred Williams is celebrated for his iconic paintings of the Australian landscape, yet his outstanding achievements as a draughtsman of the human figure are little known. This revealing exhibition shines a light on Williams' extraordinary drawing practice and reveals his life-long commitment to the medium – which he maintained both before and after he developed his distinctive, abstracted style.'

Fred Williams: The London Drawings will be on display from 21 October 2022 – 29 January 2023 at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia at Fed Square, Melbourne. Free entry. Further information is available via the NGV website: NGV.MELBOURNE

The NGV warmly thanks Lyn Williams AM and Family for their instrumental contribution.

IMAGES: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/zk4h3bcgqgmz831z/AAANM1B_LIp7WN4LAR3aKVHa?dl=0

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Image caption:

Fred Williams

Elephant 1953

conté crayon

25.2 x 31.8 cm (sheet)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Presented by the Art Foundation of Victoria by Mrs Lyn Williams, Founder Benefactor, 1988

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Fred Williams

Drawing for Cheetah c. 1953

black and brown conté crayon

21.0 x 19.4 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of Lyn Williams AM and Family through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2022

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