

Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions: a new mentorship program to platform emerging First Nations artists



13 July 2023: The first and only initiative of its kind in Australia, the **Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions** is a national, biennial mentorship and exhibition program that pairs emerging Australian First Nations artists and designers with one of eight esteemed industry mentors. Working collaboratively, the mentors will each support and guide an emerging artist to create their most ambitious work to date.

Representing the first partnership between the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) and Country Road, the Commission series builds upon existing programs that meaningfully support First Nations communities, including Country Road's partnerships with Darwin Aboriginal Art Fair Foundation and the NGV's Indigenous Fashion Commission.

The Country Road + NGV First Nations Commission series engages a mentor and artist pairing from each of the eight Australian states and territories. Invited by the NGV to participate in the Commission, the eight mentors each nominated an emerging artist for the Commission opportunity which includes guidance through the conception, development and creation of a major work. The nominated artists represent a diverse range of artistic and creative disciplines, ranging from weaving and textiles, to installation, painting and more.

Responding to the theme of 'My Country', these new works will be unveiled in March 2024 in a major exhibition at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, coinciding with Country Road's milestone 50th anniversary.

The Commission series acknowledges and nurtures the creative relationships that endure between artists and their mentors around the country. The mentorship is structured to reflect and champion the nuanced storytelling and knowledge sharing systems that exist within First Nations communities. With commissioned works entering the NGV Collection, the Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions further strengthens the NGV's globally significant holdings of Australian First Nations art and design and establishes an important legacy for future generations.

The inaugural recipients of the Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions are:

- **Tony Albert** (Mentor) and **Warraba Weatherall** (QLD)
- **Maree Clarke** (Mentor) and **Mitch Mahoney** (VIC)
- **Peggy Griffiths** (Mentor) and **Jan Griffiths** (WA)
- **Jonathan Jones** (Mentor) and **Sophie Honess** (NSW)

- **Vincent Namatjira OAM** (Mentor) and **Alec Baker and Eric Barney** (SA)
- **Denise Robinson** (Mentor) and **Cheryl Rose** (TAS)
- **James Tylor** (Mentor) and **Aidan Hartshorn** (ACT)
- **Pedro Wonaeamirri** (Mentor) and **Johnathon World Peace Bush** (NT)

Tony Ellwood AM, Director, NGV, said: 'The Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions creates a major new platform for First Nations art and design in Australia. The unique mentorship format – the only one of its kind in Australia – offers career-defining opportunity to emerging practitioners to create a new work under the guidance of a mentor.'

'We're grateful for the support of Country Road for this important new initiative. This mentorship program has enabled NGV to cultivate important new relationships with First Nations practitioners across the country. With the eight works entering the NGV Collection, this commission will enhance our ability to represent and profile our rich and diverse Indigenous communities,' said Ellwood.

Myles Russell-Cook, Senior Curator, Australian and First Nations Art, NGV said: 'Initiatives like this are vitally important. For many First Nations people, the concept of intergenerational knowledge transfer is at the heart of how we live our lives. For artists, mentoring is a way of giving back. Mentorship is something that motivates us; it is about respecting the knowledge of those who have come before us, and making space for those who will come afterwards.'

Elle Roseby, Managing Director, Country Road, said: 'This program presents an incredible opportunity to further our work in supporting First Nations communities, in a first-of-its-kind partnership that is led by First Nations artists. We're thrilled to be working together with the NGV to platform inspiring creatives across the country, while celebrating their stories and increasing the recognition of First Nations cultures, histories and knowledge.'

By funding the creation and acquisition of these major new works, as well as providing a national exhibition platform, the Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions reflects both the NGV's and Country Road's commitment to supporting First Nations artists and designers living and working today.

The exhibition for the Country Road + NGV First Nations Commissions will be on display March 2024 at The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Fed Square, Melbourne. For further information, please visit the NGV website: [NGV.MELBOURNE](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au)

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IMAGES: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/6p1ak8xsh03m454l2hyi0/h?rlkey=1pvm343e7vh5adn0oivpyiild&dl=0>

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