

8 DECEMBER 2008

## Media Release

### **‘Great Collections’ first ever exhibition by all eight NSW State collecting agencies to be launched by the Premier this Thursday**

The Botanic Gardens Trust, the Australian Museum, the Art Gallery of NSW, the State Library of NSW, the Powerhouse Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Historic Houses Trust of NSW and State Records NSW are all partners in a landmark showcase of the great collections of New South Wales to be opened by the Premier and Minister for the Arts, the Hon Mr Nathan Rees, at Campbelltown Arts Centre on Thursday 11 December 2008.

Organised and presented by the key development agency for the museums and galleries sector, Museums & Galleries NSW, *Great Collections* offers an unprecedented look at the history of collecting in Australia in an exhibition which ‘converges’ material from diverse agencies like never before. From the first botanical specimens gathered by Sir Joseph Banks on Captain Cook’s voyage of 1770 (from the National Herbarium of NSW) to a 2006 parody of a celebration of Cook’s landing by Aboriginal artist, Daniel Boyd (from the nation’s only institution dedicated to contemporary works by living artists – the Museum of Contemporary Art), *Great Collections* is a remarkable display of over 115 rare and significant art, objects, documents and curiosities from some of the country’s oldest, most unique and most important public collecting agencies – and a fascinating look at the business of public collecting in Australia.

A number of noteworthy items in the exhibition – including the Charter of Justice, providing the authority for the establishment of the nation’s first courts of law in 1787, and a petition signed by 121 Chinese miners at the Rocky River Goldfield in 1866 (both from State Records NSW) – have never been displayed publicly before. Most have never been seen outside their metropolitan homes until now. Certainly none of them have ever been put together in an exhibition like this before. *Great Collections* is the first opportunity for audiences across New South Wales and Victoria to glimpse the wealth, diversity and extent of all of the great NSW cultural collections in a single show, presented around a number of ‘collecting’ themes.

The result of over three years of negotiations and planning, *Great Collections* is an ambitious undertaking for Museums & Galleries NSW, whose aim is to spearhead innovation in the museums and galleries sector, and the exhibition has been especially developed for touring to new audiences beyond inner metropolitan Sydney.

“We had a vision to bring something truly extraordinary – and something of outstanding quality – to audiences in outer metropolitan and regional New South Wales,” said Maisy Stapleton, CEO of Museums & Galleries NSW.

“No one had ever conceived of an exhibition of this type or on this scale before – and certainly not one which incorporates material from all our wonderful State institutions. The achievement of *Great Collections* is the way it combines rare artefacts and objects, scientific specimens, photographs, documents and other curiosities – as well as a wide selection of works of art sourced from Australia and abroad – and reveals surprising new connections across the state’s collections. *Great Collections* is not only a spectacular showcase of extraordinary material but also a fascinating look at the the business of collecting in Australia over the past two hundred years,” Ms Stapleton said.

*Great Collections* has been curated by the Australian art specialist, John McPhee, former Senior Curator of Australian art at the National Gallery of Australia, and former Deputy Director of the National Gallery of Victoria. The exhibition has been supported by Visions of Australia, The Gordon Darling Foundation and the NSW Government Exhibition Indemnity scheme and has been made possible by the generous collaboration of the eight State collecting institutions as well as the involvement of the five exceptional cultural facilities which will host the exhibition over the next nine months. *Great Collections* has also been made possible by sponsors, International Art Services and TED Fine Art Services, and media partner, ABC Local Radio. Entry to the exhibition is free.

Media kit and more information, including full tour details, a PDF of a 125 page, superbly illustrated and annotated catalogue and a schools education kit, is available at [www.mgns.org.au](http://www.mgns.org.au) or by calling 02 9358 1760. ■

#### **Media contact**

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*Extensive photo collection available*

## Great Collections

**Treasures from Art Gallery of NSW, Australian Museum, Botanic Gardens Trust, Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Museum of Contemporary Art, Powerhouse Museum, State Library of NSW, State Records NSW.  
Presented by Museums & Galleries NSW**

Opening by the Premier of NSW, the Hon Mr Nathan Rees

6pm, Thursday 11 December 2008  
Campbelltown Arts Centre  
Corner Camden and Appin Roads  
Campbelltown  
Tel 02 4645 4100

Exhibition 12 December – 18 January 2009

Free

### Tour itinerary

Tweed River Art Gallery 6 February – 15 March 2009  
Western Plains Cultural Centre 3 April – 10 May 2009  
AlburyCity LibraryMuseum and Albury Regional Gallery 29 May – 5 July 2009  
Ballarat Fine Art Gallery 24 July – 30 August 2009

### Available for interview

John McPhee, Curator  
Maisy Stapleton, CEO, Museums & Galleries NSW  
Directors and curators from collecting agencies

### Sample of items on display

Great Collections is presented around a number of themes: 'Making Collections', 'Exploration and Discovery', 'Collecting History' and 'Collecting for the Future'.

Some of the 115 extraordinary items in the exhibition include:

- Nuremburg Chronicle (1493)
- Works by European masters including Durer (1496 and 1501), Rembrandt (1643), Cezanne (1896) and Picasso (1881)
- Major works by more recent international artists including Joseph Beuys, Ron Mueck and Hossein Valamanesh.
- Specimens collected by Sir Joseph Banks and Banks' specimen cabinet
- Other fossils and Australian animal and plant specimens collected in the 19th century
- An Aboriginal boomerang and club possibly collected on Captain James Cook's voyages, 1768-1780
- Sextant reputedly used by Captain James Cook
- The Charter of Justice for the establishment of the first Australian legal system in 1787 (never displayed before)
- Hunting tools of the Malyangapa people of Milparinka, NSW, collected in 1904
- Items of furniture made for the Macarthurs and Governor Macquarie
- Gold washing cradle (1851), map of mid-western NSW goldfields (mid 19<sup>th</sup> century) and a petition from 121 Chinese miners at Rocky River Goldfield in 1886 (never displayed before)
- The death mask, pistol, gaol photograph and letters of bushranger, Captain Moonlite
- Works by great Australian artists including Arthur Streeton, Russell Drysdale, Olive Cotton, Max Dupain, David Moore and Brett Whiteley
- Contemporary works by emerging artists including the Kingpins and Daniel Boyd.
- Photographs, original publications and manuscripts by great Australian writers Henry Lawson, Miles Franklin and Patrick White (including a letter to Santa Claus by the six year old White)
- A selection of prints, drawings and furniture associated with the experiments in 20th century modernism in Australia (including works by Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Burley Griffin, Marion Mahoney Griffin and Marion Best)
- Works from the MCA's Ramifying Collection of contemporary Aboriginal artworks from remote north-central Arnhem Land.
- Other contemporary artworks by Aboriginal masters including John Mawurndjui and Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri
- ... and more.

### Contact

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Website [www.mgnsw.org.au](http://www.mgnsw.org.au)