

Media Release

Art Gallery of New South Wales unveils opening program for transformation and expansion



The Tank space in the new building at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, photo © Art Gallery of New South Wales, Jenni Carter

Sydney, Australia: Epic sculptures by international artist **Adrián Villar Rojas** installed in a vast underground former Second World War fuel tank, large-scale *narrbong-galang* (*many bags*) by Waradgerie artist **Lorraine Connelly-Northey** and an exuberant floral sculpture by **Yayoi Kusama** are among the highlights of the opening program for the expanded Art Gallery of New South Wales.

The Art Gallery today unveiled its new exhibitions, collection displays and inaugural Tank commission as part of the Sydney Modern Project. The opening program, featuring works by more than 900 Australian and international artists, will be free to visitors when the transformed art museum opens on 3 December.

On Gadigal Country, overlooking Sydney Harbour, the expanded art museum comprises the new SANAA-designed building and the existing late-19th-century building, connected by an art garden.

President of the Art Gallery's Board of Trustees **David Gonski AC** said: 'Given the scale of our ambitions for the largest cultural project in Sydney in half a century, I'm very proud we're delivering it on time and on budget with generous funding from the NSW Government and our longstanding community of donors.'

The ambitious project celebrates several firsts for the Art Gallery. The expansion creates a prominent new destination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, and the new building opens with gender parity in the collection and temporary exhibition displays. The Art Gallery is also setting new benchmarks in sustainability as the first public art museum in Australia to be awarded a 6-star Green Star design rating by the Green Building Council of Australia.

Proposing the world seen from Sydney, the opening program contributes to important global conversations. Visitors will encounter works across the campus that engage, inspire, provoke and delight.

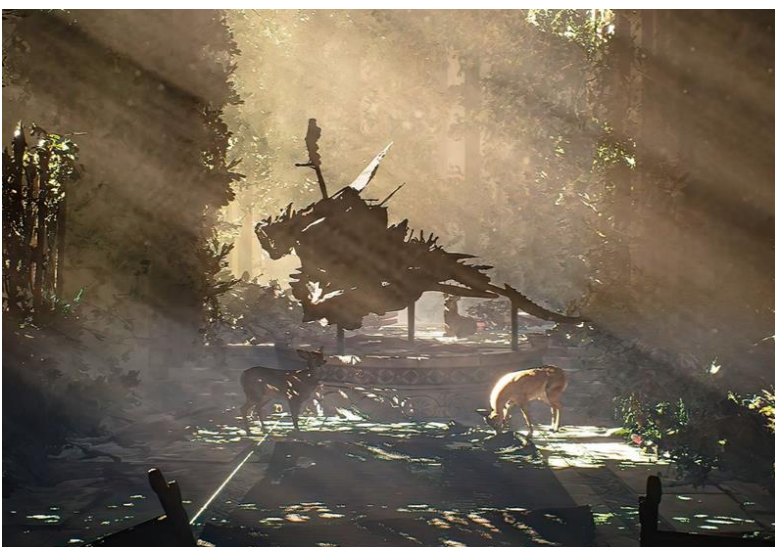
Recent acquisitions and commissions by artists on display for the first time include **Khadim Ali, Karla Dickens, Jeffrey Gibson, Samara Golden, Barkley L Hendricks, Kimsooja, Simone Leigh, Sanné Mestrom, Elizabeth Pulie, Shireen Taweel, Howie Tsui and Justene Williams.**

Art Gallery of New South Wales director **Dr Michael Brand** said: 'My vision for the Sydney Modern Project has been to transform the Art Gallery into an art museum campus with seamless connections between art, architecture and landscape; a generous and intelligent art museum that believes the art of the past is crucial to understanding the art of our own times.

'The new building, designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architects SANAA, almost doubles our exhibition space and, with a more porous connection between indoors and outdoors, delivers new types of spaces for new thinking and new forms of art.

'It is through a series of creative transformations – such as the centrality of Indigenous Australian voices, SANAA's elegantly restrained but technically complex design, site-specific commissions from some of the leading artists of our time, and new cultural juxtapositions in the display of art in both buildings – that will better connect the voices of artists past and present with our audiences.'

Inaugural Tank commission



View from live environmental simulation generated by 'Time Engine' software © Adrián Villar Rojas, 2022

Minister for the Arts and Tourism **Ben Franklin** today announced Argentine-Peruvian artist **Adrián Villar Rojas** as the inaugural artist commissioned for the underground gallery known as the Tank, located on the lowest level of the new building.

Villar Rojas' [*The End of Imagination*](#) will take over the 2,200-square-metre former oil tank, now a spectacular exhibition space. The installation is the culmination of a four-year long engagement with the Art Gallery for Villar Rojas, who is known for collaborative, site-specific sculptures, including on the roof of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2017.

'The completion of the Art Gallery of New South Wales' expansion not only offers more art for more people but also unveils a hidden treasure – a former Second World War naval fuel tank masterfully repurposed as a world-class exhibition space, where visitors will be able to view this first Tank commission, *The End of Imagination*,' Franklin said.

'Adrián is internationally renowned for his vast, site-specific installations that offer immersive art experiences. On behalf of the NSW Government, it is with great pleasure that I welcome you to experience his work from 3 December. Great global cities encourage experimentation and adventure in art and *The End of Imagination* is a new exhibition staged in an exciting new space for Sydney, presented by the state's tourism and major events agency, Destination NSW, in collaboration with the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

'I look forward to the expanded Art Gallery attracting visitors from across the state, the nation and from around the world as we open this must-see destination for art in the nation's cultural capital.'

Michael Brand added, 'It's a rare experience for a museum director to open an art space as distinctive architecturally and as redolent historically as the Tank. I am thrilled that we will be displaying the work of Adrián Villar Rojas as our inaugural commission for this art experience that is unique to Sydney.'

Villar Rojas, who first visited the Art Gallery in 2018, said: 'The project that has grown in the four years following is the product of many hands, many minds, many conversations, many questions, and many mediums including the virtual and physical. And one of the most important mediums has been time – the time to dwell in a space, to talk with everyone from archivists to Indigenous curators to conservators, to push ideas and technologies, and to draw into the project the conditions of a world that has changed massively.

'Although I have been lucky to work in many cities and unique sites and remarkable museums, from the rooftop of The Met in New York to an island off the coast of Istanbul, this project in Australia is a special one, not only because I have been trusted with a space of such uniqueness on Gadigal Country, but because it reminds me of many conversations with many caring and generous people across four years in remarkable places in your country. My team and I hope it is evident, from the incredible amount of love and labour that has gone into the project you will eventually see, how honoured we are to be hosted here in this exceptional new art space for our first project in Australia.'

Site-specific commissions

Nine bold and compelling new commissions that will be on display both inside and outside the new building include **Francis Upritchard's** *Here Comes Everybody*, a trio of playful pairs of bronze beings that will greet visitors in the Welcome Plaza; **Jonathan Jones's** *bial gwiyoŋo (the fire is not yet lighted)*, a living artwork at the heart of the expanded Art Gallery; **Lisa Reihana's** (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine, Ngāi Tū) moving-image work *GROUNDLOOP*, overlooking the central atrium; **Richard Lewer's** multi-panel painting *Onsite*,

construction of *Sydney Modern* which resides on the lands of the Gadigal of the Eora Nation, which records some of the individuals involved in constructing the new building; and Yayoi Kusama's *Flowers that bloom in the cosmos*, which will be prominently positioned on the stepped terrace overlooking Woolloomooloo Bay.

'The works resonate with, and sit within, the strong and continuous Aboriginal history of this place,' said deputy director and director of collections Maud Page. 'They variously humour, confront, prod and delight, drawing on a myriad of narratives, from sci-fi to particular histories from this part of the world. A number of them privilege First Nation knowledges. Asian voices also loom large, as do, of course, Australian perspectives.'

'Each commission was chosen to respond to our collection, to SANAA's lyrical architecture or to simply document the building site. Many of the commissions engage with urgent social issues: migration, displacement, labour value and climate change. They are as aesthetically varied as they are rigorous, and powerfully herald new art histories to be written from here.'

Opening exhibitions and collection displays

When visitors enter the new building, they will be welcomed by the inaugural display of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in the newly relocated [Yiribana Gallery](#). The display is inspired by ideas of generosity and care and emphasises connections between people.



Installation view of the Yiribana Gallery photo © Art Gallery of New South Wales, Jenni Carter

Other exhibitions in the new building include:

- [Dreamhome: Stories of Art and Shelter](#) – artists reflect on 'home' from their own richly local perspectives, while also registering shared hopes and anxieties that are felt in many places at this time
- [Making Worlds](#) – features ideas of mapping, time, creation and connection centred around Kimsooja's monumental participatory work *Archive of mind* in the large column-free gallery
- [Outlaw](#) – celebrates the antiheroes of popular culture in the Art Gallery's first purpose-built new media gallery

The much-loved existing building has been revitalised with beautifully refurbished spaces restoring architectural features, and a fully re-installed collection across all galleries. Visitors can journey through time, ideas, human stories and contested histories, including:

- [From Here, for Now](#) – a new exhibition which presents works in 10 curated rooms that begin with Australia's outback as a signifier of national identity, connecting this with American stereotypes of outsiders, and hidden histories, through works by Charlene Carrington, **Rosemary Laing**, **Robert MacPherson**, **Richard Prince** and **Kaylene Whiskey**. The exhibition also features a new commission, **Simryn Gill's** major new work *Clearing*, responding to elements of the natural history of the new building's site.
- [20th-century galleries](#) – featuring works from the Art Gallery's Australian and international collections that highlight the connections and distinctions between local artists and broader global developments over some of the most tumultuous, exciting and innovative decades in art and human history. This new display includes the restaging of **Ken Unsworth's** *Suspended stone circle II*, with 103 river stones each weighing around 15kg suspended by 309 wires, now hanging over two levels for the first time in the newly unveiled atrium.
- [Asian Lantern](#) – featuring the exhibitions *Correspondence*, where visitors will find works of art marking important moments in Asian art and history, and *Elemental*, which investigates the natural elements of earth, water and fire.
- [Grand Courts](#) – with a focus on the Art Gallery's historical collections, enlivened by contemporary voices that encourage moments of pause and reflection.

The following assets are available for media via the download links below:

- Detailed media kit about the opening program - [DOWNLOAD](#)
- Hi res artwork images and photographs related to the opening exhibition program, along with captions, and a statement from **Adrián Villar Rojas** - [DOWNLOAD](#)
- B-roll footage and timelapse of construction of the Art Gallery's new building as well as the completed Tank space - [DOWNLOAD](#)

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About the Art Gallery of New South Wales

On Gadigal Country

The Art Gallery of New South Wales acknowledges the traditional custodians of the Country on which it is located, the Gadigal of the Eora nation, and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. From its magnificent site in Sydney, the Art Gallery is one of Australia's flagship art museums and the state's leading visual arts institution. Its mission is to serve the widest possible audience as a centre of excellence for the collection, preservation, documentation, interpretation and display of Australian and international art, and a forum for scholarship, art education and the exchange of ideas. As the Art Gallery prepares to open its significant expansion on 3 December this year, it remains committed to making art a vital part of everyday life.

The transformation of the Art Gallery – the Sydney Modern Project – will create a new art museum experience across two buildings connected by a public art garden in one of the world's most beautiful cultural precincts. The Art Gallery's new building, designed by Pritzker Prize-winning architects SANAA with Architectus as executive architect, brings together art, architecture and landscape in spectacular new ways with dynamic galleries and seamless connections between indoor and outdoor spaces. It will be a new prominent destination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture. Together with the NSW Government's \$244 million in funding, the Art Gallery has raised more than \$100 million from donors to support the project, which is being delivered by Infrastructure NSW and built by Richard Crookes Constructions. The Art Gallery remains open during this time.

artgallery.nsw.gov.au

Strategic sponsor

