

North Rotunda

May 2025

The elegant North Rotunda was constructed in the 1940s, its cream walls framed by pink-terracotta architraves. Subsequent colour schemes have included simple grey, cream and pale green finishes, as well as its current vibrant red.

Historically, the Rotunda has exhibited portraiture. These portraits form part of the State Collection, which contains more than one million images collected over 160 years, documenting the social history of Victoria.

The paintings on display here include portraits of writers, poets, artists, activists and other individuals who have contributed to the history and cultural life of the state. The portraits bring to life aspects of Australian culture and society, revealing to us the sitters, the artists and their times. Through them, we can see how portrait-making has changed over time, not only in the stylistic techniques of the artist or the dress of the sitter, but also the genre itself and the scope of what portraiture can be.

State Library Victoria acknowledges the generosity of Porter's Paints in supplying the custom colour, 'North Rotunda Red, for this gallery.

These portraits, painted at the height of settler colonialism in Tasmania and south-eastern Australia, show that while portraiture is most often used to mark stature and celebrations, traditionally it has also been used to commemorate mourning and sorrowful times.

Ellen Cosgrave (nee Atcheson), in the portrait simply titled *Mrs John Cosgrave*, is featured in mourning dress.

Unfortunately, her story is not included in the historic record; she is known only for her husband's role as a politician in early Melbourne. Her portrait sits alongside two others, *a mother and a daughter*, both named Mary Lawrence. The mother is in mourning and the daughter sits for her engagement portrait. Both enjoyed a life of privilege as the wives of wealthy landowners in Tasmania at a time of great upheaval for Tasmania's First Peoples, a decade after martial law and the Black Line.



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1 Oswald Rose CAMPBELL

Mrs John Cosgrave 1853

Oil on canvas

Find in catalogue: H34829

2 Henry MUNDY

Mrs Lawrence as a widow c. 1841

Oil on canvas

Bequest of Miss Elsie Hindson, 1968, through Mrs Beth Henty-Anderson, 1992

Find in catalogue: H94.103/1

3 Henry MUNDY

Mary Ann Lawrence, later Henty 1841

Oil on canvas

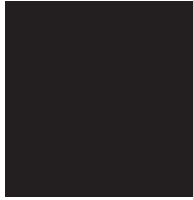
Bequest of Miss Elsie Hindson, 1968, through Mrs Beth Henty-Anderson, 1992

Find in catalogue: H94.103/2

Maree Clarke, a Yorta Yorta, Wamba Wamba, Mutti Mutti, Boonwurrung woman, is a pivotal figure in reclaiming south-east Australian Aboriginal art and cultural practices. Here we see a portrait of Maree alongside a group portrait of women in mourning, from the series *Ritual and ceremony*, which explores the traditional grief and mourning practices of Aboriginal people along the Murray–Darling. The series speaks of the impacts of colonialism on land, language and culture, but through Clarke's practice of cultural regeneration, we see the power of art to heal. It leaves us to consider the erasure that is the legacy of colonial settlement and collecting institutions.

My art is about regenerating cultural practices, making people aware of, you know, our culture, and that we are a really strong culture, and that we haven't lost anything; I think ... some of these practices have been lying dormant for a while.

– Maree Clarke



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4 Maree CLARKE

Mutti Mutti, Wamba Wamba, Yorta Yorta, Boonwurrung

Self-portrait 2012

Exhibition print of inkjet print photograph

Purchased 2023

5 Maree CLARKE

Mutti Mutti, Wamba Wamba, Yorta Yorta, Boonwurrung

Women in mourning 1, 2012

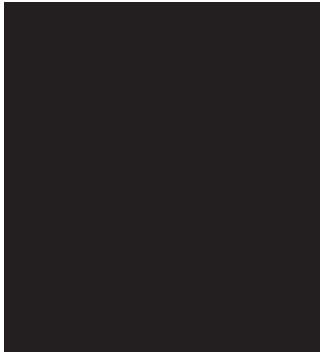
Exhibition print of inkjet print photograph

Purchased 2023

The painting by Sharon West at the centre top of this display is an ironic play on the 19th-century salon hangs, which were popular in Europe and introduced at colonial galleries and museums across the world. Densely hung pictures of animals and scenes from the 'new' Australian colonies verge on fantasy to emphasise the exoticism at the heart of the colonial gaze.

Displayed around West's painting are portraits that the Library has collected over the past 160 years. Many of their subjects are well known for their impact on or contribution to the history of Victoria. There are also people whose names have not been recorded in the archives, so the sitters cannot be identified.

Two recent self-portraits by photographers Atong Atem and Hoda Afshar question the traditions of representing identity. Atem alludes to classical Western painting through the pose she assumes, yet she subverts this tradition by using her colourful dress as a striking symbol of her South Sudanese culture. By contrast, Afshar wears a hijab in her Andy Warholesque portrait to comment on the stereotypical representations of Islamic women in Western art, and society more broadly.



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6 Max FÜRST

Portrait of Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls, Yorta Yorta 1965

Oil on canvas

Gift of the artist, 1974

Find in catalogue: H36045

7 Hoda AFSHAR

The Westoxicated #4 2013–14

Exhibition print of archival pigment print photograph

Purchased 2023

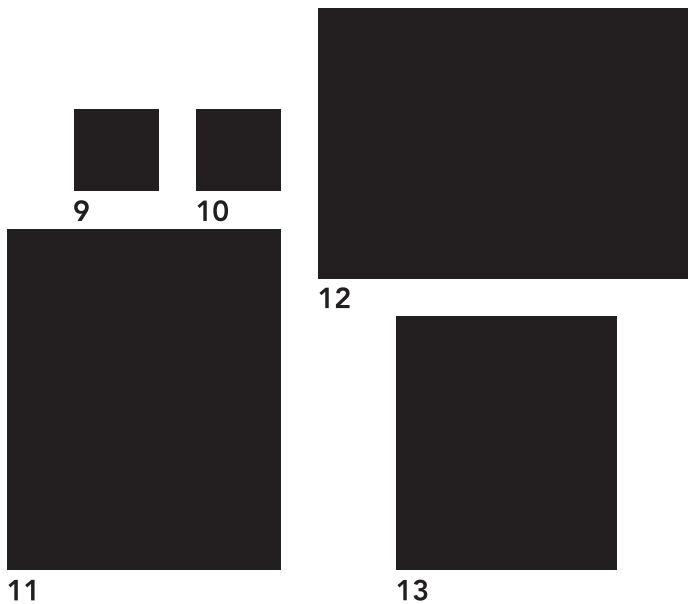
8 Arthur Thomas CHALLEN

Name unrecorded c. 1937

Oil on canvas

Challen Collection

Find in catalogue: H28388



9 Kenny

Gunaikurnai

Four mobs coming together at a meeting place 2022

Acrylic on canvas

Purchased 2023

Find in catalogue: H2023.31 /2

10 Dools

Gunaikurnai

Family[®] me, partner and kids 2021

Acrylic on canvas

Purchased 2021

Find in catalogue: H2022.6

11 William BECKWITH MCINNES

Family portrait [Ethel Margaret Ewing] 1926

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs Ethel Margaret Ewing Cutten, 1990

Find in catalogue: H92.174

12 Sharon WEST

The Royal Academy summer salon 2006

Oil on canvas

Purchased 2012

Find in catalogue: H2012.253/2

13 Gainsborough DUPONT

Matthew Flinders c. 1788–90

Oil on canvas

Gift of Sir W. Russell Grimwade, 1951

Find in catalogue: H32342



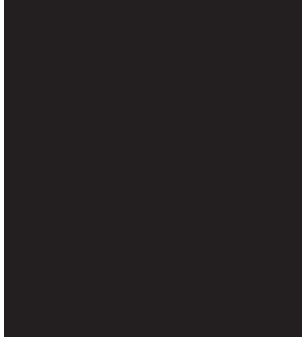
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14 Philip LINDO

Portrait of the late Mr Augustus Tulk 1852

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mrs Jane Tulk, 1878

Find in catalogue: H292

15 May and Mina MOORE

Portrait of a Mori woman, name unrecorded c. 1910–13

Exhibition print of gelatin silver photograph

May and Mina Moore Collection

Find in catalogue: H38782/637

16 Alice BALE

Portrait of William Rowell c. 1924

Oil on canvas

Purchased 1988

Find in catalogue: H88.63

17 Paul FITZGERALD

Portrait of David Wang 1966

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Wang family, 2008

Find in catalogue: H2018.504

18 Rick AMOR

Henry Maas (Buddy Lovestein) 2007

Oil on canvas

Gift of the artist through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program, 2008

Find in catalogue: H2009.82/22

19 Atong ATEM

Yellow Dress 2 2022

Exhibition print of digital photograph

Purchased 2022

Find in catalogue: H2022.122

In 1904 the Australian artist Frederick McCubbin painted his triptych *The Pioneer*. McCubbin hired models and painted the work near Mount Macedon in Victoria, with views across land owned by his friend, William Peter McGregor who was the second chairman of the mining company BHP.

While McCubbin was always non committal about the narrative within his work, *The Pioneer* is undoubtedly a romanticisation of the selectors, who cleared the land in a frenzy of slashing and burning for the mass cultivation of imported livestock. The impact of the cloven hooves of these animals upon the newly bared land changed the composition of the soil forever.

The title of McCubbin's work, *The pioneer*, marginalises thousands of years of nurturing land management by Aboriginal communities. McCubbin's triptych, with its association to the coal mining company and its almost religious view of land clearing by European settlers, offers an unintentionally prophetic vision of the sustained Anglo dominance of Australian popular culture, the continuing extractive nature of the country's economy and the death of Australia's natural environment.

– Yask Desai



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20 Yask DESAI

The big Australian 2020

Exhibition print of digital inkjet on Ilford Gold Fibre Gloss paper

Purchased 2022

Find in catalogue: H2022.117

I enjoy photographing people who want to be there and enjoy and understand the idea of a portrait collaboration.

– Mia Mala McDonald

People and play are at the heart of Mia Mala McDonald's photographic portraits. She has photographed many Australian celebrities, including Darcy Vescio who is featured in these images. Recognised for their impact in the professional women's Australian Rules Football League (AFLW), Vescio is an openly non-binary player who advocates for multiculturalism and gender equality in sport. The portraits were originally produced as charity posters, with all proceeds benefitting the Melbourne Period Project, which provides sanitary supplies to homeless women, trans and non-binary people.



21



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21-22 Mia Mala McDONALD

Flying high® AFLW footballer Darcy Vescio 2018

Trophies® Darcy Vescio and all their trophies 2018

Exhibition prints of archival inkjet colour prints

Find in catalogue: H2019.125/1

Find in catalogue: H2019.125/2

From portraits of Helen Brack and Phyl Waterhouse to Sybil Craig's self-portrait, artists feature prominently in the State Library Victoria collection.

Bashir Baraki's *Pieta*, set against the backdrop of the early AIDS crisis in Australia, revisits the iconic Christian imagery of Michelangelo's *Pieta*. In Baraki's reinterpretation, the traditional maternal figure of Mary cradling her deceased son is replaced with two men. This substitution not only highlights the suffering and passion of the gay male but also serves as a poignant commentary on the collective anguish experienced by the queer community during that time.

The self-portrait of Hayley Millar Baker, from her series *I will survive*, questions memory and altered truths. How do we interpret stories we are told? How do we remember them and what narratives do we keep alive?



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25 Kirsten Lyttle

Waikato: Ngiti Tahinga, Tainui a Whiro

Mekameka weave 2012

Exhibition print of giclee print on Ilford Galerie Gold Fibre Silk

Purchased 2023

26 Bashir BARAKI

Pieta

Exhibition print of black and white photograph

Find in catalogue: H2012.125

27 Ian Armstrong

Portrait of Helen Maudsley c. 1965

Oil on canvas

Purchased 2008

Find in catalogue: H2008.132



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28 Sybil CRAIG

Self-portrait c. 1934

Oil on composition board

Gift of Sybil Craig, through Mr Jim Alexander, 1989

Find in catalogue: H89.282

29 Hayley MILLAR BAKER

Gunditjmarra, Djabwurrung

I will survive: 8 2020

Exhibition print of inkjet print on Canson Baryta

Purchased 2021

Find in catalogue: H2022.7

30 Charles BUSH

Phyl Waterhouse, c. 1958

Oil on composition board

Gift of Mrs Margaret Carnegie and the estates of
Charles Bush and Phyl Waterhouse, 1991

Find in catalogue: H92.415

Portraits have long served as ways for artists to document their creative communities, capturing friendships and personal connections. They have also provided a means for artists to depict themselves in the act of art-making.

Renowned artist Fred Williams painted the portrait above of Stephen Murray-Smith, founder of the literary journal *Overland*. Best known for his vast Australian landscapes, Williams also painted friends and family as well as commissioned portraits, including this one from 1980. The Library holds an extensive Murray-Smith archive, covering this literary figure's editorial work, research and journals.

On the adjacent wall is a painting of Marc Strizic, a self-taught photographer who left a career in physics to pursue photography. After moving to Melbourne from Zagreb, Croatia, in 1950, he became a leading commercial photographer. His friendship with artist Clifton Pugh, who painted this portrait, led to their book *Involvement* (1968), exploring portraits in painting and photography.

Over time, the names and stories associated with portraits can be forgotten. The woman shown smoking in the painting above and holding a Box Brownie camera in the colourful photograph on the adjacent wall is a mysterious figure featured in *Make Believe: Encounters with Misinformation*. This exhibition is on display in the Library's Keith Murdoch Gallery from 16 April 2025.



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31 Fred WILLIAMS

Stephen Murray-Smith 1980

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mr David Murray-Smith through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2013

Find in catalogue: H2014.95

32 Scotty SO

Seated Chinese Woman Holding an Abalone Shell Lacquer Nicotine
Diffuser 2024

Oil on canvas, with 19th-century gilded frame

Courtesy of the artist and MARS Gallery, Melbourne



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33 Clem Fraser

Maggie Diaz working in Chicago, USA c. 1950/59

Exhibition print of black-and-white negative

Find in catalogue: H2015.31 /12a

34 Sue Ford

Self-portrait with Bouffant 1961

Exhibition print of gelatin silver photograph printed by Sandy Edwards, c. 1986

Find in catalogue: H99.223/1

35 Scotty So

Self-portrait of a Hong Kong Bride with Bouffant Wearing a Qungua, Traditional Chinese Wedding Attire, before her Wedding, in the 1960s 2024

Exhibition print of type C photograph

Courtesy of the artist and MARS Gallery, Melbourne

View more works by Scotty So in the exhibition *Make Believe: Encounters with Misinformation*, on display in the Library's Keith Murdoch Gallery from 16 April 2025.

36 Edna Walling

Self-portrait c. 1930/65

Exhibition print of black-and-white negative

Find in catalogue: H96.150/278

37 Clifton Pugh

Portrait of Mark Strizic 1968

Oil on masonite

Find in catalogue: H2007.21