



MEDIA RELEASE

NEW WEEKEND OPENING HOURS at The Johnston Collection

WISH FULFILMENT | A Vision Realised

On 19 March, The Johnston Collection will open its doors for the first time to visitors on weekends. Every weekend.

This will mark the fulfilment of the vision that noted Melbourne-born, London-based antique dealer William Johnston had dreamed of in the early 1970s.

William Johnston had a vision for his East Melbourne townhouse, *Fairhall*, as an exhibition house to display his remarkable collection of 18th century English antiques. Johnston declared that his museum “shall be open for public inspection at least on Saturdays and Sundays of each week throughout the year and at such additional other times, from time to time.”

Director, Louis Le Vaillant says, “Johnston dreamt that on weekends visitors would be able to knock on the front door of his house and be welcomed into the wonderful world of his collection that he had assembled over the last four decades of his life”

“Opening on weekends will usher in a whole new era for the museum. It will be a real shift in how we operate and how and who can come to see the collection. It will mark a very exciting new chapter for us and for Melbourne” Le Vaillant adds. “We will be better able to reflect the city’s character and play a greater part in its creative community.”

The Johnston Collection opened to the public for the first time in November 1990, but could not open to visitors consistent with Johnston’s original intention. Due to a strict Planning Permit the museum could only open on weekdays. Now after long and exhaustive discussions with residents and working closely with the City of Melbourne, TJC will enjoy expanded opening hours and be more accessible to locals as well as visitors to Melbourne than at any time during its first thirty remarkable years.

“While we adapted to reach as wide an audience as possible on weekdays over this time, people’s expectations and use of their recreational time has changed remarkably. Only being open on weekdays was a quaint but limiting anachronism in relation to what contemporary visitors expect when visiting

museums. We are over the moon to be able to welcome the people of Melbourne and beyond back to the museum at more user-friendly times," says Le Vaillant.

"Opening on the weekend is another of the first steps in recovering from what was, for us all, a very challenging year in 2020. It was extremely heart-warming to see how much our museum means to people when we were closed last year. Having been pushed close to the brink by the sustained financial hit of the COVID-19 lockdown, opening over weekends gives us a new confidence and a renewed vigour to attract as many visitors as possible through our doors."

William Johnston elected to collect, with a cogent understanding of the aesthetic sensibilities of the English 18th and early 19th centuries, objects which represent and handsomely evoke these periods. His collection included examples of various types of furniture, ceramics, and other decorative items representative of some of the most significant styles, fashions and periods in English art, including that of the British Empire in India in its heyday, as well as some examples of European art favoured by tastemakers during these periods. Johnston wished these items to be displayed to the public in a regularly changing domestic setting.

William Johnston had an aversion to conventional museum displays and so conceived the idea of an independent house museum decorated to complement his personal collection in *Fairhall*, a classified early Victorian townhouse in East Melbourne. *Fairhall* is decorated substantially as it was at the time Johnston lived there, and its interior echoes the decorative style and aesthetic qualities of the English 18th century, as well as that of the classical tastes of mid-20th century London and cosmopolitan Melbourne.

For over 30 years, *Fairhall* has presented a unique opportunity in Australia to experience fine objects from the English 18th and early 19th centuries in elegant interiors that demonstrate the role of fine and decorative arts.

One hundred years ago, William Johnston was given a delicate Minton porcelain teacup by his grandmother. With this gift, a young boy's appreciation for beautiful objects was born and nurtured his subsequent passion for collecting antiques. Now, at last, William Johnston's gift to the people of Victoria, and his wish that his extensive collection be displayed for public enjoyment will be accessible, as never before, on the weekends that he longed for.

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SELECTED QUOTES:

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ABOUT THE JOHNSTON COLLECTION

The Johnston Collection is a place where people meet art and artists.

The Johnston Collection (TJC) is an exhibition-house of visual art and design centred in an historic Melbourne townhouse. A gift to the people of Victoria by William Robert Johnston (1911-1986) it is administered as an independent not-for-profit museum by the WR Johnston Trust.

Since 1990, The Johnston Collection has provided visitors, from near and far, with transformative exhibition and learning experiences to discover, experience and engage with artists, objects and ideas through dynamic temporary programs based on its permanent collection.

As a multi award-winning and critically acclaimed museum, The Johnston Collection invites creatives from the broader visual arts and design communities to re-interpret the Collection, offering special tours, study days and lectures throughout the year, that share stories and inspire communities.

The Johnston Collection celebrates 30 years of being open to the public, having welcomed more than 170,000 visitors to Fairhall during that time. TJC displays the works from Johnston’s collection in *Fairhall* the themed exhibition-house.

The Johnston Collection also incorporates a reference library, as well as a lecture space offering an active and engaging range of lectures, workshops and events for all.

ABOUT WILLIAM JOHNSTON

William Robert Johnston (1911-1986) was a 20th century collector, property investor and antique dealer who amassed an extraordinary collection of English Georgian, Regency, and Louis XV furniture, paintings, ceramics and *objet d’art* over his lifetime.

Johnston was born in Lilydale, Victoria in 1911, the only child of Robert Alexander Johnston, a boot-maker and Louise Friedrichs, a scullery maid. Around the age of eight, William was

given a Minton cup by his grandmother, Mary Theresa Friedrichs which became the first piece of his collection and provided inspiration for a career in antiques.

After an early career in window merchandising in Melbourne, Johnston relocated to London to begin a fulltime business dealing in antiques. He purchased *Fairhall* in 1952 with profits he made from the sale of antiques brought back from England. Originally named Cadzow, built in 1860 and extended ten years later, Johnston renamed it *Fairhall* and remodelled it in order to create the appearance of a late 18th century Georgian-style townhouse.

In 1972, Johnston returned to live part-time in Melbourne, gathering his collection of 18th century English and Louis XV fine and decorative arts into *Fairhall* and other properties he owned in the area. At the same time, he opened Kent Antiques in High St, Armadale.

William Johnston's house, collection and estate were bequeathed to the people of Victoria after his death in 1986 'as a place of historical and educational interest.'

It is now administered as an independent not-for-profit public museum by The WR Johnston Trust. *Fairhall* was converted into an exhibition-house with a garden designed in the English manner. The Trust also acquires new works for the permanent collection, which comprises over nearly 1,500 items.