



MEDIA RELEASE

THE REAL DEAL | WILLIAM JOHNSTON

His Residence and Collection

Wednesday 16 March 2022 – Sunday 11 September 2022

William Johnston was a 'dealer, collector, decorator, enthusiast, property investor, landlord, and story-teller'.

This annual WILLIAM JOHNSTON: His Residence & Collection exhibition will consider, through Johnston's character as a dealer & trader, and through his collection, how he sourced and made things attractive for the market and for himself.

From an early age, William Johnston (1911-1986) had an untrained but natural ability to pick out 'good pieces' from auction houses and homes he visited in Melbourne.

He had an obvious passion for collecting. Encouraged by his mother, Johnston developed his talent as a dealer that led to a lifetime of buying and selling to an enthusiastic market and creating his own collection.

Johnston's life as an entrepreneurial antique dealer enabled him to travel the world to seek out stock in other parts of the world: England, Europe, Asia, and America. Fuelled by demand, and as stock grew scarce, Johnston could furnish clients houses with the right, sometimes fabricated, pieces.

You will discover that William Johnston changed the name of his house *Fairhall* and with a few relatively simple changes to the windows turned it from a Victorian house to one with the appearance of an 18th century English Georgian home.

Inside *Fairhall* *THE REAL DEAL* highlights work that were acquired in Johnston's early days as a dealer in Melbourne and London, as well as objects that were left behind in his antique shop, Kent Antiques in Armadale.

You will be enthralled by *Throne chairs and sofa* purchased by Johnston in India which were part of an extensive suite of Neoclassical drawing room furniture once in Government House, Calcutta, and now referred to as the Calcutta suite. It is definitely from Government House as each piece is stamped "GHC". The furniture was made in India to match some existing English-made furniture in Government House, Calcutta. Several photos show the chairs *in situ*, one is a full-length portrait

of Lady Casey, Johnston's neighbour in East Melbourne, taken during the time when her husband was Governor of Bengal (1944-1946).

Equally, a magnificent *Bureau Plat (writing desk)*, circa 1745, was reputedly the desk on which King Farouk of Egypt signed his abdication in 1952

You can also enjoy the story of the famous *Willow pattern* used on ceramic housewares around the world. The *Willow pattern* became immensely popular at the end of the 18th century in England when it was invented by English potteries combining and adapting motifs inspired by desirable hand-painted blue-and-white wares imported from China. You will learn of its creation at a time when mass-production of decorative tableware at Stoke on Trent and elsewhere, was already making use of engraved and printed glaze transfers, rather than hand-painting, for the application of ornament to standardised vessels.

We are also enormously thrilled to welcome visitors with our **new opening hours**.

Starting with this exhibition we look forward to sharing all our exhibitions and events with you all from Wednesday – Sunday's, marking the fulfilment of the vision that William Johnston had dreamed in the early 1970s.

Opening on weekends has allowed us to continue to ensure The Johnston Collection is accessible for visitors, whether visiting in a group or individually.

"We want people to know that they don't have to be part of a Probus Club, a group, or the like to visit. We want people to know that they can visit as groups or as individuals" says director and CEO Louis Le Vaillant.

Enjoy a visually enticing display of over 400 years of art history and share William Johnston's lifetime passion for collecting. Rare items will adorn each room of *Fairhall* exhibition-house as you immerse yourself in otherworldly treasures and luscious interiors, filled with stories of travel and tales of the past. Experience objects gathered by William Johnston unfettered by ropes or barriers.

THE REAL DEAL | WILLIAM JOHNSTON: His Residence & Collection offers a traditional interpretation of the Collection.

Fairhall is one of the few exhibition-houses in Australia to be unfettered by ropes and barriers, visitors will be guided through the exhibition-house, enjoying remarkable stories of desire and affection from the past and of the present from nearly 1,500 objects, paintings, ceramics, furniture, and *objet d'art*.

Johnston intended that *Fairhall* be regularly rearranged. Past rearrangements have included those by fashion designer Akira Isogawa, architect Pascale Gomes-McNabb, fashion-house RomanceWasBorn, artist Rosslynd Piggott, Artistic Director of The Australian Ballet David McAllister AO, milliner and artist Richard Nylon, and design studio Hecker Guthrie.

The experience of TJC begins at The Pullman on The Park hotel, East Melbourne where visitors are picked up by courtesy bus and travel a few short minutes to the museum to begin their tour.

This exhibition is supported by The Friends of The Johnston Collection.

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SELECTED QUOTES:

LOUIS LE VAILLANT | Director | Curator

“We want people to know that they don’t have to be part of a Probus Club, a group, or the like, to visit. We want people to know that they can visit as groups or as individuals, and we are thrilled to be able to welcome visitors on the weekend.”

DOROTHY MORGAN | TJC Exhibition Coordinator

“Sometimes, the arrangement of the figures on the tables told a story about what was going on at the time. There’s always a story associated with each of these figures [on the Green Drawing Room dining table] and we wanted to portray that here, as well as throughout the whole exhibition.”

LOUIS LE VAILLANT | Director | Curator

“The Green Drawing Room was used as a space where he retailed his stock and told so many stories. We want to share these stories to visitors through our tours in *‘THE REAL DEAL’*.”

“There are objects in this collection, owned by William Johnston, that no one knew existed until he died. This exhibition shares just some of those intimate stories about the collection, opening a whole new world of discovery and learning for our visitors.”

ABOUT THE JOHNSTON COLLECTION

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

The Johnston Collection (TJC) is a multi-award-winning and critically acclaimed museum that invites creatives from the broader visual arts and design communities to re-interpret the Collection through a regular program of re-installation and interventions of the permanent collection.

Since 1990, TJC has provided visitors, from near and far, with transformative exhibition and educational experiences to **discover**, **experience** and **engage** with artists, objects and ideas through dynamic temporary programs, lectures, workshops and tours based on its permanent collection.

This year we are enormously thrilled to welcome visitors with our **new opening hours**. We look forward to sharing all our exhibitions and events with you all from Wednesday – Sunday's, and especially **every Saturday and Sunday** (except public holidays) marking the fulfilment of the vision that noted Melbourne-born, London-based antique dealer William Johnston had dreamed of in the early 1970s.

TJC is comprised of nearly 1,500 objects mostly from the English 18th century and is regarded as one of most significant collections of its kind in Australasia.

ABOUT WILLIAM JOHNSTON

William Robert Johnston (1911-1986) was a 20th century collector, antique dealer, and property investor who amassed an extraordinary collection of 18th century English 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 bootmaker and Louise Friedrichs, a 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 money 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 to create the appearance of a late 18th century neo-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.

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*,' now administered as an independent not-for-profit public museum by The WR Johnston Trust. *Fairhall* exhibition-house and garden was converted and presented in the English manner. The Trust also continues to acquire new works for the permanent collection.