

Over the past 12 months The Johnston Collection demonstrated its ongoing commitment to support community and creative collaborations by presenting four highly successful new exhibitions incorporating commissioned and new works.

The work of more than 50 contemporary artists was presented, with hundreds of contemporary artworks and installations exhibited in *Fairhall* throughout the year, in dialogue with William Johnston's historic collection.

As an exhibition space, the rooms of *Fairhall* are presented as a series of eight discrete gallery spaces, enabling individual artists and artists collectives to explore themes of their own as well as the overarching themes of the broader exhibition.

Central to our vision is challenging our audiences to embrace the unfamiliar and unexpected and to think about and try and understand new ways of making and seeing art.

In July 2016, Melbourne-based independent arts company, Barking Spider Visual Theatre was invited to collaborate with the museum for the 'house of ideas' exhibition, **HOUSE OF DREAMS**. Taking their inspiration from Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Jung's dream theories, a team of visual theatre artists from the company transformed *Fairhall* into a series of themed rooms installed as dreamscapes incorporating selected items for the Collection along with found object assemblages and works made especially for the exhibition. The metaphors and symbols of dreams were used to convey stories exploring the history of William Johnston and his residence Fairhall.

RETURN TO THE CITY, our annual Christmas exhibition commenced in October 2016, featuring new works commissioned by The Johnston Collection from some of Melbourne's best contemporary makers. Introducing a new generation of artists to our audience, **RETURN TO THE CITY**, delighted and provoked our audience, making them think about new ways of making art. A highlight of the exhibition was the Hotham Street Ladies whose icing-coated installation in The Green Drawing Room, 'The morning after the night before', was based on an once Christmas party hosted by



William Johnston following his return from swinging London, and the wreckage and debris left by the departing guests after a night of debauchery.

In February 2017 we presented **BEING MODERN**, an exhibition celebrating the highly designed world of the English Georgian and

Regency, the period represented in the Collection. **BEING MODERN** was a restaging of the first exhibition held in *Fairhall* when the museum first opened to the public in November 1990, honouring this important cultural event by re-creating architect Peter Lovell's and inaugural director Judith Thompson's, first innovative arrangement of the Collection.

In June 2017 we held our annual 'house of ideas' exhibition, **ANIMAL KINGDOM**, showing animal-inspired objects from the Collection juxtaposed with fantastical works by some of Melbourne's leading contemporary artists. This exhibition sought out representations of animals and explored the ways in which animals and people have related in various artforms over time.

Menu tours focusing on particular areas in the Collection were also presented throughout the year along with a number of specially curated programmes for Melbourne cultural events including the Melbourne Food & Wine Festival, the Virgin Australia Melbourne Fashion Festival and Open House Melbourne.

In 2017 we presented more than 40 lectures and study series featuring a range of local and international speakers from a variety of fields, offering diverse perspectives and sometimes provocative interpretations on a range of topics. Highlights included the **DREAM PLACES** Study Series, a series of ten lectures reflecting on the themes of dreams and dreamers; **IN PRAISE OF 'CAPABILITY' BROWN**, a series of four lectures marking the 300th anniversary of the great British landscape designer; and an Exclusive Masterclass, **UNLOCKING INTERNATIONAL TREASURES** with Wolf Burchard, the Furniture Research Curator at the National Trust of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We also provided a series of special events throughout the year for members of The Friends of The Johnston Collection to further encourage learning and a sense of community.

We were thrilled to be shortlisted in two categories at the MGA Museums & Galleries National Awards in May 2017 – in



the Temporary or Travelling Exhibition category for **WILLIAM JOHNSTON'S EMPORIUM | Hecker Guthrie rearranges William Johnston's Collection**, and in the Interpretation, Learning & Audience Engagement category for **HOUSE OF DREAMS** curated by Barking Spider Visual Theatre. In 2017 we were also ranked 23 in *Time Out* magazines '50 things to do in Melbourne before you die' which drew many interstate and overseas visitors to the museum.

This year we continued our OPENING DOORS campaign to raise much-needed funds to enable us to continue to provide innovative and enriching programs as well as to preserve William Johnston's legacy into the future. In July we held an inaugural fundraising Gala Dinner at *Cranlana* in Toorak, raising more than \$33,000 on the night. I thank our hardworking fundraising committee led by Lisa Arrowsmith and all our generous donors this year for their support.

All our achievements this year are the result of the very hard work of the many volunteers, supporters, members, and staff of The Johnston Collection. I would like to thank them all for their commitment, expertise and enthusiasm and for recognising the importance of what we do and for making The Johnston Collection the welcoming and vibrant place that it is.

Louis Le Vaillant

DIRECTOR | CURATOR

2017