



THE JOHNSTON COLLECTION

A museum of fine and decorative arts

*incorporating*

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### ***ANOTHER LOOK | WILLIAM JOHNSTON: His Residence & Collection***

Monday 12 February 2018 – Tuesday 22 May 2018

A sumptuous grand Anglo-Indian reception room inspired by the formal reception rooms of Government House, Calcutta, features in The Johnston Collection's new exhibition *ANOTHER LOOK | WILLIAM JOHNSTON: His residence & Collection* opening on 12 February 2018.

In this exhibition The Green Drawing Room in *Fairhall* is re-presented as a Durbar Room, displaying many of the significant items gathered by Melbourne antique dealer William Johnston on his frequent buying trips to India.

The exhibition includes items purchased by Johnston from the sale of vice-regal furniture from Government House, Calcutta (now known as Raj Bhavan, Kolkata) including the magnificent 'salon suite' which was used by celebrated English photographer Cecil Beaton CBE in his portrait of Melbourne-born Lady (Maie) Casey who as the wife of Richard Casey became the Vicereine of Bengal during the last years of the British Raj. The salon suite is displayed in the Durbar Room alongside other splendid examples of imperial Indian style from The Johnston Collection.

India was one of Johnston's favourite places to source antiques as India had huge quantities of European antiques brought there during the British colonial period. Johnston visited often, particularly from the period of Indian partition in 1947, after which the first Prime Minister Nehru, and then later his daughter, Indira Gandhi, reduced the pensions of the princely rulers of the Indian states meaning they could no longer afford to maintain their palaces and servants and began selling off their furniture and valuables.

Items on display in *ANOTHER LOOK* include the huge marble topped table purchased by Johnston from the Maharajah of Tagore, and a quirky chair made of antlers bought from the Maharajah of Cossimbazar.

William Johnston bequeathed his collection along with his residence *Fairhall* to the people of Victoria after his death in Pune, India in 1986. The Johnston Collection is

comprised of more than 1,400 objects mostly from the English Georgian and Regency period and is regarded as one of the best collections of its kind in Australasia.

The concept to create a sumptuous Indian-inspired 'Durbar Room' was proposed when the museum first opened in 1990 but was never realised at the time. This room, which became known as The Green Drawing Room, is a stunning space in which to display a gentleman's collection.

Louis Le Vaillant, Director and Curator of The Johnston Collection says "The Durbar Room which features in *ANOTHER LOOK* displays the trophies of a collector and dealer who sourced his objects from the former British Empire, creating a distinctive 20<sup>th</sup> century collection which can be viewed within a new and original context in this exhibition".

"*ANOTHER LOOK* explores ideas around how a viewer in the 21<sup>st</sup> century might appraise art and design from another time, in particular the legacies of imperial objects and display and how we arrive at a contemporary understanding of them" he says.

*ANOTHER LOOK* showcases Johnston's incredible collection including many fine paintings such as the series of Regency miniatures by the acclaimed 18<sup>th</sup> century miniaturist James Scouler; a superb portrait of Lady Montagu by the trailblazing female artist Mary Beale (1633–1699), regarded as the first professional female artist and one of the most important portrait painters of the 17<sup>th</sup> century; outstanding examples of period furniture including a Pembroke table, a George III breakfront bureaux and a Louis XVI style salon suite; and much more.

It was William Johnston's intention that, *Fairhall*, be regularly rearranged. Past rearrangements have included those by fashion designer, Akira Isogawa, architect, Pascale Gomes-McNabb, fashion-house, Romance Was Born, artist Rosslynd Piggott, Artistic Director of The Australian Ballet, David McAllister AO, milliner and artist Richard Nylon and design studio Hecker Guthrie. The series of rearrangements of William Johnston's collection in *Fairhall* provides visitors with an opportunity to continuously see the Collection through another person's eyes and aesthetic.

*ANOTHER LOOK* continues to explore one of the themes underpinning The Johnston Collection, that 'Old is New'.

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**ABOUT WILLIAM JOHNSTON AND THE JOHNSTON COLLECTION**

The Johnston Collection is an exhibition-house of fine and decorative arts centred in an historic Melbourne townhouse. William Robert Johnston (1911-1986) was a 20<sup>th</sup> century collector and antique dealer who amassed an extraordinary collection of Georgian, Regency, and Louis XV furniture, paintings, ceramics and *objet d'art* over his lifetime. His

collection was bequeathed to the people of Victoria after his death, and is displayed in a constantly changing domestic setting in his former residence, *Fairhall*.

Johnston was born in Lilydale, Victoria in 1911, the only child of Robert Alexander Johnston and Louise Friedrichs. His father was a boot-maker and his mother, before her marriage, worked as a maid at Stanford House, East Melbourne.

Around the age of eight, William was given a Minton cup by his grandmother, Mary Theresa Friedrichs (nee Clarke). This became the first piece of his collection and provided the inspiration for a career in antiques that took Johnston around the world.

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 in order to create the appearance of a late 18<sup>th</sup> century Georgian-style townhouse. The interior rooms were converted into three rental flats.

By 1972, Johnston decided to return to live part-time in Melbourne, and gathered his expanding collection of Georgian, Regency and Louis XV fine and decorative arts into *Fairhall* and other rental 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* was converted into the exhibition-house and a garden was designed in the English manner to highlight Johnston's love of gardening. The Trust also acquires new works for the permanent collection, which now cares for over 1400 items.

## **ABOUT THE JOHNSTON COLLECTION**

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 over 28 years of being open to the public, having welcomed more than 100,000 visitors to *Fairhall* during that time. The Johnston Collection displays the works from Johnston's collection in *Fairhall* in three themed exhibition-house tours each year. 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.

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