



## THE JOHNSTON COLLECTION

A Museum of Fine and Decorative Arts

*incorporating*

*Fairhall* exhibition-house | Lectures | Reference Library | Shop

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **FEAST**

#### ***Christmas at The Johnston Collection 2017 – 2018***

Monday 2 October 2017 – Wednesday 31 January 2018

The creative spirits of Christmases past come to life again in **FEAST | Christmas at The Johnston Collection 2017 – 2018** an exhibition showing selected works from over the last five years of Christmas exhibitions along with a smattering of new works in a spectacular rearrangement that is a feast not only for the eyes but for all the senses.

**FEAST | Christmas at The Johnston Collection 2017 – 2018** features bold, beautiful and brilliantly diverse works from artists, guilds and collectives from the Mornington Peninsula (2013-2014), Geelong and the Surf Coast (2014-2015), Gippsland (2015-2016) and Melbourne city (2016-2017) along with new works contributed by Dorothy Morgan and Penny Wolswinkel.

This popular series which commenced in 2004, commissions makers from a different region in Victoria each year to create new works drawn from aspects of the Collection or relating to the life of William Robert Johnston (1911-1986).

The commissioned work is displayed against the back-drop of William Johnston's extraordinary collection of Regency, Georgian and Louis XV furniture, paintings, ceramics and *objet d'art* arranged in a domestic setting. William Johnston (1911 – 1986) was a prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century antique dealer and collector who bequeathed his former residence, *Fairhall*, and collection to the people of Victoria.

The work of ceramicists, weavers, spinners, yarners, patchworkers, embroiderers, lacemakers, quilters, cake decorators, glassworkers, beaders, and a host of other crafts are all on display in **FEAST**.

The exhibition includes:

- the whimsical works of paper artist **Sai-Wai Foo** along with ceramicist **Irianna Kannellopoulou's** intriguing animal-themed figures featured in The Study
- the **Melbourne Tapestry Weavers Collective** return with their vibrant and innovative contemporary tapestry works weaving stories about William Johnston's life, displayed throughout the rooms of *Fairhall*
- mixed-media artists **The Bond Family** present their exotic Indian-themed works in The Yellow Room and delicate Japanese-inspired work in The Dressing Room
- an abundance of fabulous fabric veggies by multi-media artist **Robyn Rich** features in The Kitchen

- The Green Drawing Room shows a feast of embroidery, beads and baubles. The exquisite threads of the **Embroiderers Guild (Victoria)'s Mornington Peninsula and Leongatha Country Group** branches are displayed along with the jewel-like decorations made by the **Bead Society of Victoria** and **The Beaders Guild of Geelong**, whose ornaments, created using many thousands of beads all meticulously stitched by hand, each took up to 30 – 40 hours to make.
- the **Bbaandit Yarners** have taken over the front of *Fairhall* with their colourful art while the **GLAD Rappers** have yarn stormed The Sitting Room upstairs
- textile and paper maker **Dorothy Morgan** has created a series of new works reflecting on the themes of peace and hospitality for *FEAST* which are displayed as one installation in The White Room and The Blue Room

***Christmas at The Johnston Collection*** celebrates the possibilities of using particular crafts and skills in different ways by encouraging the makers to explore new contemporary practices and ideas. The result is a stunning and stimulating exhibition of contemporary craft viewed against the background of William Johnston's historic collection.

**Louis Le Vaillant, Director | Curator of The Johnston Collection**, said: "The works in *FEAST* demonstrate the depth, breadth and ingenuity found in contemporary craft practice in Victoria. This exhibition showcases the extraordinary talents and the diverse approaches of our local makers who work across a whole range of media. *FEAST* shows craft as it is practiced today, reflecting and engaging with the world we live in."

### **For further information, images or interviews, please contact:**

**Felicity Cook** or **Fil Natarelli** | T: 03 9416 2515 | M: 0412 460 450

E: [admin@johnstoncollection.org](mailto:admin@johnstoncollection.org) | W: [johnstoncollection.org](http://johnstoncollection.org)

### **ABOUT THE MAKERS**

**SAI-WAI FOO** is a Melbourne based emerging artist, who began to develop her art practice 2012. Her fashion design background influences and informs her current art practice which primarily focuses on the manipulation and folding of cut paper, to produce volume and structure from a traditionally two-dimensional medium. Sculptural works combine these organic paper growths with other pieces of collected ephemera to create vignettes and still points in time.

In a contemporary world of mass production, reworking yellowing pages into sculptural forms is a foil to those mechanical processes. The fragility of brittle aging paper gleaned from discarded books, manuscripts that bear marks of previous lives. The act of cutting, folding and manipulating paper beyond the flat plane, is implicit in its human connection and continues this discussion, pushing the work into the three-dimensional realms. Foo's practice seeks to repurpose redundant items, in turn questioning how items are used and re-used. How the unwanted can be turned it into an object that will be once again treasured, seeking to re-appropriate the rejected and imbue it with a new value once again precious and prized. Foo has exhibited her work at a number of galleries including Port Jackson Press, Yering Station Sculpture Prize and Wagner Contemporary. She recently undertook project management of the *Maticevski: Dark Wonderland* exhibition, Bendigo Art Gallery, August 2016-January 2017 and did the illustrations for *Maticevski: A Colouring Book*, 2016

**IRIANNA KANELLOPOULOU** is a contemporary ceramic artist whose work and narratives explore issues of identity and (dis)placement through a transformation of images and found objects outside of their initial intent and purpose. Her work features masked identities, fragmented conversations and fleeting moments and deliberately shifting relationships between human and animal qualities.

Kanellopoulou has exhibited extensively in Australia and in prestigious international exhibitions including *Talente* in Munich, Germany, SOFA in Chicago USA and Gallery25 in New Delhi, India. She was invited as Guest Artist in residence at University of South Australia and The Clay Studio, Philadelphia USA, where she also exhibited. Kanellopoulou has been the recipient of several grants and awards including Australia Council for the Arts and the Toyota Award.

**JACKIE MCNAMEE** is originally from Belfast, Northern Ireland, studied sculpture at Edinburgh College of Art and was based for a number of years at Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop in Scotland. She has exhibited in Europe, Scandinavia, and Australia and now lives in Mallacoota, East Gippsland.

**DOROTHY MORGAN** first exhibited her work at The Johnston Collection in the Christmas 2003 show. A textile and paper maker **Dorothy Morgan** has created a series of new works reflecting on the themes of peace and hospitality for *FEAST* which will be displayed as one installation in The White Room and The Blue Room.

Morgan previously was a Guest Curator of the exhibition *FLOWERING NEEDLES: embroidery from Elizabeth to Victoria*, (2010) and the exhibition-house tour *FAIR HALL TO GLAD PARLOUR: The Flower, Its Beauty & Meaning in Art & Ornament* (2011). With a particular interest in embroidery and textiles she has presented several lectures on related topics at both The Johnston Collection and other venues. Her most recent talk at The Johnston Collection was *SAVAGE NATIONALISM: Tartan from William Wallace to Alexander McQueen*

**ROBYN RICH** is a Melbourne based artist whose works incorporate painting, drawing and sculpture, three things she finds that demonstrate “*my ideas and narratives of the everyday object and the people that use them. My artwork is filled with whimsical tales, obscure ideas and subtle comments on everyday society. In creating this work I aim to communicate stories to the viewer and allow them to walk away with their own interpretation.*”

Rich first exhibited in the 2005 Christmas at the Johnston Collection exhibition again in the 2013 and 2016 Christmas shows. She regularly exhibits in solo and group exhibitions and is in numerous public and private collections in Australia.

In *FEAST* Rich has created a domestic scene as if William Johnston is about to cook the Christmas dinner. Rich said: “I love the story that Johnston would buy produce from Vic Market and at the end of the day when the produce was at the cheapest. My selection of handmade fabric fruit and veggies is all a bit moth eaten and wilted to typify his frugal feasting.

**INGRID THOMAS** of the Bbaandit Bombers of the The West Gippy Group (Members of the Baw Baw Arts Alliance) has been yarn bombing - or its alternative name "granny graffiti" - for a number of years now. Thomas said: “I see it as an ephemeral sculptural form. I like the surprise element of people coming across artworks in unexpected places. I like the spontaneity of the activity, of

changing the environment for a time without causing damage.” She also says that she likes the fact that you can create public art without all the paperwork that goes with working with local government. Thomas with the Bbaandit Yarners have created many works around Warragul and Drouin.

**THE BEAD SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC** was founded in 1994, and held its twentieth anniversary celebrations in 2014. The Society includes members who are collectors and interested in the history of beads, and crafts people, who are interested in creating objects with beads.

**THE BOND FAMILY** comprises Maureen Bond and her four daughters, Catherine Byatt, Marissa Byatt, Glenda Piddington and Jenny Williams. Maureen has nurtured in her girls (and also her three sons), a long-standing family tradition of resourcefulness and of making something out of nothing. The Bond Family continue to improvise and have developed a wide variety of skills over the years, in textiles, timber, painted design, porcelain and glass. They enjoy making art of all kinds, both independently and collaboratively.

**Glenda Piddington of The Bond Family** said: “We have truly fallen in love with The Johnston Collection We love the drama of the Rooms and who would not be inspired to start sewing, painting, cutting, gluing, hammering, drilling ... ?! We certainly have had plenty of giggles working together on these! We would also acknowledge the support of our fabulous husbands in assisting with trickier metal and woodwork. They know the deal, if you’re in this family, you’ll be roped in as well!”

**THE DECOUPAGE GUILD OF AUSTRALIA INC (MORNINGTON PENINSULA GROUP)** is an off-shoot of The Decoupage Guild of Australia Inc. It has come together this year to form a cohesive group that can work together for The Johnston Collection Christmas tour. They hire the Uniting Church Hall on Saturdays to share our ideas and images, gather information, promote participation and give constant input and ‘back up’..

Decoupage follows the ancient techniques developed in 18<sup>th</sup> century Venice, and features delicate cut-paper images assembled on a painted background. The design is secured under many coats of varnish then sanded and polished to achieve an effect which can rival the finest wooden inlay or the most delicate piece of porcelain. Melbourne is amongst the leading decoupage cities of the world.

**EMBROIDERY ESSENTIALS NEEDLEWORK SCHOOL** was launched in October 2011 as the teaching forum of the retail business ‘Embroidery Essentials’ in Carrum Downs. The proprietor of the Needlework School is Linda Hicks. Linda is a member of The Embroiderers Guild, Victoria (Mornington Peninsula Branch), and also a member of the American Needlepoint Guild.

The team which Linda put together for this exhibition have all had lessons or done classes with her since the Needlework School began. The group range in age from 55 to 75, and have a diverse array of skills. All the members in the group reside in and around the Mornington Peninsula and Frankston area and are members of The Embroiderers Guild, Victoria.

**THE EMBROIDERERS GUILD, VICTORIA** was founded in Melbourne in 1960 and has approximately 1400 members throughout Victoria, including 10 country branches and two country groups.

**The Embroiderers Guild, Victoria (Leongatha Country Group)** commenced in 1987 as an informal Guidance Group, where a small band of enthusiastic embroiderers met in each other's homes to learn and share embroidery techniques. Over the years that number has expanded to more than 30 members from across South Gippsland - Phillip Island to the Latrobe Valley; united by their passion for a wide variety of embroidery techniques, projects, community sharing and further education.

**The Embroiderers Guild, Victoria (Mornington Peninsula branch)** celebrated 40 years of activity in 2014. They meet each Wednesday at the Mt Eliza Community Centre. They also hold classes for members and have a biannual exhibition.

**THE GEELONG ARTISANS GROUP (GAG)** was formed in 2010. It includes makers from Geelong and the Surf Coast. Participants are members of The Beaders Guild of Geelong, The Embroiderers Guild of Victoria (Geelong branch), Geelong & District Porcelain Painters, Geelong Hand-weavers & Spinners Guild Inc, Geelong Patchworkers & Quilters' Guild Inc, Leopold Lacemakers, Art Dolls of Geelong as well as individual artists. The group works together to share information, and strengthen and promote awareness of arts and crafts from the Geelong – Bellarine and Surf Coast region.

The member's techniques include embroidery, textile art, porcelain art, lace-making, tatting, beading, patchwork, weaving and spinning, art dolls, art, weaving with plant fibre, woodcraft, and more. Some pieces created for Christmas at the Johnston Collection combine the skills of a number of the makers.

**FUSIONFAN INC. (FUSION FIBRE ARTS NETWORK)** is a creative textile and fibre art network launched in 2008. **Fusion** encourages its members to expand their knowledge of concept building and artistic interpretation to develop skills using many mediums which foster and extend the potential for artist creativity. Skills of the members include wet and dry felting, embroidery, beading, spinning and weaving, quilting, knitting and crochet, multimedia, fabric painting, textile shaping and sculpting and paper art.

In 2012, Fusion developed a six month Artist Development program which was funded through the Regional Arts Fund administered by Regional Arts Victoria culminating in an exhibition launched at the East Gippsland Art Gallery and then a tour of galleries including Meeniyana Art Gallery, FeastonART Gallery in Orbost and Wellington Art Gallery Maffra, attracting over 2000 gallery visitors. The art was highly praised and commended on its beauty and diverse conceptual interpretation.

**THE GLAD RAPPERS** is an informal group of textile artists who came together in 2014, to install a yarn bomb for Melbourne Indesign, the architectural industry expo. They collaborated with industrial knitter Otto & Spike on that project and have maintained a connection with them.

Installations by The GLAD Rappers include:

- Melbourne Indesign
- Federation Square bike racks
- Main Street Mornington trees for the Mornington Traders Association
- Sydney Road, Brunswick poles for Brunswick Traders Association
- Trees in Elizabeth Street, Melbourne for Lincraft and Highway to Hell
- Trees in Swanston Street, Melbourne for Craft Victoria
- Flagpoles and tram stop handrails in Elizabeth St, CBD for Royal Melbourne Show
- Art Town 'Picnic in the Park'
- Art Town Poles

- '21 Trees' - Spring Street
- Bikes for Otto & Spike
- Bikes for Road Safety Authority advertisement

**MELBOURNE TAPESTRY WEAVERS' COLLECTIVE** is made up of a diverse group of tapestry weaving artists from across Victoria. It grew out of the RMIT tapestry weavers' online group, which formed in 2010, allowing ex-students to share their love of tapestry weaving. The membership has expanded to include weavers from the course at SWTAFE, others who have participated in classes at the Handweavers and Spinners Guild of Victoria and the Australian Tapestry Workshop and by word of mouth. **Members whose work is on display in FEAST are** Glennis Leary, Karlie Hawking, Pat Scholz, **and** Elizabeth Long.

**Pat Scholz** whose *William Johnston - the loom* work features a woven image of William Johnston said: "By leaving the back of the tapestry uncovered, it alludes to those things that are hidden and indicates that by seeing "another" side of something, we can often better understand it."

**MORNINGTON PENINSULA PATCHWORKERS INC** was founded in Mt Martha in 1982 and now has over 200 members who meet each month in Mornington. The Club supports local nursing homes, hospitals and individual people with their "Caring Quilts" and Teddies .

**RIVIERA QUILTERS INC** was formed by a group of patchworkers in East Gippsland in 1989 and now has a membership of well over 100. Many members come from other parts of country Victoria as well as Melbourne and South East NS W. The group meets in Bairnsdale twice a month and holds an exhibition every two years.

## **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 1999, 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 27 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.

## **ABOUT CHRISTMAS AT THE JOHNSTON COLLECTION**

Since 2004, artists and craftspeople from a different region of Victoria have been engaged by The Johnston Collection to create works inspired by *Fairhall* and the Collection for the *Christmas at The Johnston Collection* house-museum tour.

Hundreds of makers are involved in producing the work for this popular tour each year. The artists work on their projects for up to 18 months before the show and then from November to February, the works are displayed in *Fairhall* against the backdrop of William Johnston's collection.

Through working with the creative guilds, craft societies and communities of artists across the State, The Johnston Collection has been able to support the continuation of the traditions of crafting and artistry in Victoria. When creating work for the Christmas tour, makers are encouraged by The Johnston Collection to use their craft in new and challenging ways. By supporting the continuation of old crafts utilising new designs, The Johnston Collection has helped to re-invigorate the guilds, societies and communities of participating artists.

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PO Box 79 | East Melbourne VIC 8002 | Australia

T: + 61 3 9416 2515 | F: +61 3 9416 2507 [admin@johnstoncollection.org](mailto:admin@johnstoncollection.org) | [www.johnstoncollection.org](http://www.johnstoncollection.org)

ABN 87194940961