



## THE JOHNSTON COLLECTION

A museum of fine and decorative arts, East Melbourne

*incorporating*

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### MEDIA RELEASE

## **BEING MODERN**

### **WILLIAM JOHNSTON: HIS RESIDENCE & COLLECTION**

**Monday 13 February – Tuesday 30 May 2017**

*Fairhall* exhibition-house is presented as an English Georgian period inspired domestic interior in a new installation at The Johnston Collection, on now until 30 May 2017.

In *BEING MODERN* | *William Johnston: His Residence & Collection*, the museum's extraordinary collection of Georgian, Regency and Louis XV fine and decorative arts – regarded as one of the best collections of its kind in Australasia – has been rearranged throughout the rooms of *Fairhall*, providing visitors with an insight into how people lived and what was new in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

*BEING MODERN* is a restaging of the first exhibition held at The Johnston Collection, when the museum was first opened to the public in November 1990. Twenty-six years ago The Johnston Collection was Melbourne's newest museum and nearly three decades and more than 100,000 visitors later the museum will celebrate this important cultural event by recreating the innovative arrangement of the museum's foundation director, Judith Thompson and architect, Peter Lovell, now of Lovell Chen.

Using photographs, floor plans and layouts from the museum's archives, *Fairhall* will be re-curated as a 'modern' iteration of an English Georgian inspired domestic interior, and will continue to explore one of the themes underpinning The Johnston Collection since its inception, that 'old is new'.

The Johnston Collection, which comprises more than 1,300 objects, is the legacy of William Robert Johnston (1911 – 1986), an influential antique dealer who bequeathed his collection along with his residence *Fairhall* to the people of Victoria.

Items from this significant collection on display in *BEING MODERN* include many fine paintings such as the collection 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.

The pieces on display in *BEING MODERN* show the style and taste of the Georgian and Regency period, a period that saw a new interest in the arts, architecture and design. This

century saw some of the world's greatest designers emerge, including Robert Adam, Thomas Chippendale, George Hepplewhite, and Josiah Wedgwood, and the birth of the cult of the designer. In much the same way that we recognise Frank Gehry, Tom Dixon or Jasper Conran today, these 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> designers were household names whose work was sought after and often copied.

In exploring the designs and interior style of two centuries ago, *BEING MODERN* considers ideas around modernity and how every age thinks that it's the modern age.

Louis Le Vaillant, Director and Curator of The Johnston Collection says "*BEING MODERN* is an opportunity to re-present an important historical exhibition to our visitors again. At the same time it is interesting to celebrate the artistic achievements of the English Georgian and Regency, the core period represented in our Collection, and to explore the objects, makers and patrons of a period that has been so influential on the way we live today".

"The rooms in *Fairhall* sum up the ideal vision of the 18<sup>th</sup> century English interiors showing grace and luxury, colouring and light; the same qualities that we still look for in our interiors today" he says.

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, milliner and artist Richard Nylon and design studio Hecker Guthrie. This 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.

*BEING MODERN | William Johnston: His Residence & Collection* brings the past into the present and celebrates the history and influence of the designs and interior style of the Georgian and Regency period.

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

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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 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 1300 items.

This year The Johnston Collection celebrates 25 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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