



## THE JOHNSTON COLLECTION

A Museum of Fine and Decorative Arts

*incorporating*

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## MEDIA RELEASE

### ***AN ENGLISHMAN ABROAD: At home in British India***

**An installation by guest-curator, James Broadbent, as part of the annual 'house of ideas' house-museum tour**

**Friday 18 July 2014 – Tuesday 21 October 2014**

This winter, The Johnston Collection house-museum, *Fairhall*, will be recreated as a British-style interior found in India in the 1830s. Presented as part of our continuing 'house of ideas' series, ***AN ENGLISHMAN ABROAD: At Home in British India***, explores the fascinating world of the British Raj, and will provide visitors with an insight into what it was like to live as an Englishman in India at the time of British colonial rule

*Fairhall* will be used in this unique house-museum tour as an evocative background in which to consider the British response to things Indian, the domestic interior and the factors which shaped its appearance, and offer insights into the relationships between European, Indian and Chinese craftsmen.

***AN ENGLISHMAN ABROAD: At Home in British India***, will focus on the early 19<sup>th</sup> century British-Indian items in The Johnston Collection, along with other elements of British-Indian culture and society during this period. Using *Fairhall* as a space to convey the stories of colonial British-India, Dr Broadbent will create themes for each of the rooms and then reinforce and elaborate on these with the careful selection and rearrangement of pieces from the Collection. The Blue Room for example, will be conceived as 'Johnston's Calcutta' showcasing objects from the Collection representing imperial Indian Raj style.

The Collection's magnificent 'salon suite', which came from Government House in Kolkata (Calcutta) and was used by celebrated English photographer Cecil Beaton CBE in his portrait of Lady (Maie) Casey as Vicereine of Bengal, will be displayed alongside other examples of imperial Indian style.

The Green Room will be transformed into a 'night after' scene following an indulgent and rowdy dinner party in colonial India, informed by a popular painting of the period *A Day's Pleasure* by English artist Charles D'Oyly. In contrast, the White Room will be used as a more conventional exhibition space, where The Johnston Collection's rare and valuable Indian company paintings will be put out for display.

***AN ENGLISHMAN ABROAD: At Home in British India*** will be curated by James Broadbent, a well-known historian of domestic interiors, built heritage conservator and author, with a special interest in colonial houses, their furnishings, gardens and the people that built and lived in them. Dr Broadbent has worked extensively on the properties cared for by the Historic Houses Trust in NSW (now known as the Sydney Living Museums) and he is the author of several publications including *India, China, Australia: Trade and Society 1788-1850* (2003) and *The Australian Colonial House: Architecture and Society in New South Wales 1788-1842* (1997).

It was Melbourne-born antique dealer and benefactor William Johnston's wish that his East Melbourne home, *Fairhall*, be regularly rearranged. Past rearrangements have included those by fashion designer, Akira Isogawa, architect, Pascale Gomes McNabb, fashion-house, Romance Was Born, Melbourne artist Rosslynd Piggott and most recently, Artistic Director of The Australian Ballet, David McAllister.

The 'house of ideas' series of rearrangements, (July to October) selects creative individuals from the contemporary arts community, inviting them to use *Fairhall* as an installation site to recreate and reinterpret the Collection. The Johnston Collection is delighted to have James Broadbent to continue this exciting series.

***AN ENGLISHMAN ABROAD: At Home in British India*** house-museum tour brings the world of the British Raj to life in a house-museum setting and at the same time, provides an opportunity for visitors to view William Johnston's collection through the visual imagination and expert knowledge of one of Australia's most highly regarded historians and conservationists.

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

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### **About Dr James Broadbent AM**

Dr Broadbent is a well known historian, conservationist and author, with his main area of study being the history of colonial houses in New South Wales, their furnishings, gardens and the society that built and lived in them.

He has had a long association with the properties cared for by the Historic Houses Trust (now known as the Sydney Living Museums) and began this relationship in a curatorial role at Elizabeth Bay House in the late 1970s. He has advised on the conservation and restoration of many significant Australian houses and gardens, including *Elizabeth Farm, Vaucluse House, Rouse Hill House and Farm, Government*

*House* and the recent restoration of the garden at *Raheen*, the residence of Jeanne and the late Richard Pratt.

As the Senior Curatorial Advisor at HHT, 1991-2003, he has written numerous journal articles and book chapters and his publications, often complementing HHT exhibitions of the same theme and title, include: *India, China, Australia: Trade and Society 1788-1850* (2003) and *The Australian Colonial House: Architecture and Society in New South Wales 1788-1842* (1997), as well as co-authoring: *Francis Greenway, Architect* (1997); *The Age of Macquarie* (1992) and *Gothick Taste in the Colony of New South Wales* (1980).

Dr Broadbent lives at *The Cottage, Mulgoa* (circa 1810), an important early bungalow, which he has saved from dereliction.

## **About William Johnston and The Johnston Collection**

The Johnston Collection is a house-museum of fine and decorative arts centred in an historic Melbourne townhouse.

William Robert 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 house-museum 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.

For nearly twenty five years, *Fairhall* has displayed works from Johnston's collection, and is currently rearranged for three themed tours per year. Today, The Johnston Collection incorporates a reference library, as well as a dedicated gallery and lecture space offering an active and engaging range of exhibitions, lectures, workshops and events for all.

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