



## MEDIA RELEASE

**JANET LAURENCE |**

***THE PALM AT THE END OF THE MIND\** at The Johnston Collection**

8 July 2019 until 17 September 2019

Janet Laurence, one of Australia's most celebrated contemporary artists, will explore The Johnston Collection alongside her own creative practices - collecting and saving, nature and the environment - within the context of the Fairhall exhibition-house.

Laurence's artistic practice is based on the Wunderkammer, a *cabinet of curiosity* or a collection of notable objects. William Johnston's exhibition-house is itself a cabinet of curiosities and wonders filled with objects and items that he assembled for himself over 40 years.

William Johnston's own collecting and gathering from around the world, along with his love of gardening, will underpin and reflect Laurence's ideas. Johnston found comfort, beauty and solace as he collected plants on his international travels, created, nurtured, assembled and loved his own gardens with care. Laurence's exhibition will challenge the conventions of our exhibition spaces and the relationships to nature and culture, collecting and discovery, and the natural environment, internalised within *Fairhall*.

This exhibition is as part of the continuing 'house of ideas' project series where TJC commissions guest artists to use Fairhall as a site-specific installation space to reconceptualise the exhibition-house and explore its many layers of meaning. By doing so, The Collection will continue to consider old objects in new ways.

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Exploring notions of art, science, imagination, memory, and loss, Janet Laurence's practice examines our physical, cultural and conflicting relationship to the natural world through both site specific, gallery and museum works. Working in varying mediums, Laurence creates immersive environments that navigate the interconnections between life world.

Her work explores what it might mean to heal, albeit metaphorically, the natural environment, fusing this sense of communal loss with a search for connection with powerful life-forces. Laurence's work alerts us to the subtle dependencies between water, life, culture and nature in our eco-system. In the face of this, we do yearn for a form

of alchemy, for the power of enchantment and transformation. Her work reminds us that art can provoke its audience into a renewed awareness about our environment.

Laurence has been a recipient of Rockefeller, Churchill and Australia Council Fellowships, and the Alumni Award for Arts, UNSW. Laurence was a Trustee of the Art Gallery of NSW, a former Board Member of the VAB Board of the Australia Council and was Visiting Fellow at the NSW University Art and Design. She was also the Australian representative for the *COP21/FIAC, Artists 4 Paris Climate 2015 Exhibition*, exhibiting a major work – *Deep Breathing: Resuscitation for the Reef* – at the Muséum National D’Histoire Naturelle, in Paris, France, and a visiting fellow of the 2016/2017 Hanse-WissenschaftKolleg (HWK) foundation fellowship.

Laurence’s work is included in many Museum, University and Corporate collections as well as within architectural and landscaped public places, worldwide.

## ABOUT THE JOHNSTON COLLECTION

The Johnston Collection is an exhibition-house of visual art and design centred in an historic Melbourne townhouse. A gift to the people of Victoria by William Robert Johnston (1911-1986) it is administered as an independent not-for-profit museum by the WR Johnston Trust.

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.

## ABOUT WILLIAM JOHNSTON

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.

Johnston was born in Lilydale, Victoria in 1911, the only child of Robert Alexander Johnston, a boot-maker and Louise Friedrichs, a maid. Around the age of eight, William was given a Minton cup by his grandmother, Mary Theresa Friedrichs which became the first piece of his collection and provided inspiration for a career in antiques. 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.

In 1972, Johnston returned to live part-time in Melbourne, gathering his collection of Georgian, Regency and Louis XV fine and decorative arts into *Fairhall* and other 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 an exhibition-house with a garden designed in the English manner. The Trust also acquires new works for the permanent collection, which comprises over 1400 items.

