

Barking Spider Theatre and The Johnston Collection Present HOUSE OF DREAMS

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A mesmerising meander through arts, antiques and imagination

By Myron My

William Robert Johnston was a Melbourne-based antique dealer and a collector of beautiful things, and he wanted to share these unusual and visually arresting items with the public. Upon his death in 1986, the not-for-profit museum, **The Johnston Collection** was established. The Collection has had a rotation of guest curators including The Australian Ballet's Artistic Director **David McAllister**, milliner **Richard Nylon** and design studio **Hecker Guthrie**, who were given the opportunity to explore, regard and share the curiosities within the collection.



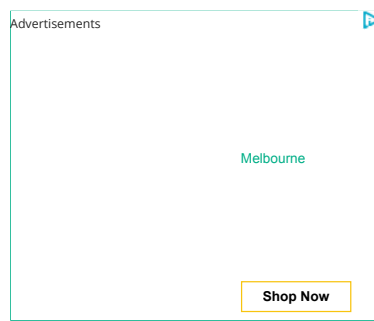
With its current exhibition, *House of Dreams*, guest curators **Barking Spider Visual Theatre** – a Melbourne-based multi-art form company – have spent the last 18 months designing the nine spaces to create a highly evocative and imaginative environment to be experienced. Led by Artistic Director **Penelope Bartlau**, the theatre company is known for its exemplary productions and varied methods of creating and sharing stories with audiences.

While we were advised to **wander around the space and devise our own story** based on what we saw and heard, I personally enjoyed learning about Johnston's childhood and family from the highly knowledgeable volunteers, and being able to **gain a deeper understanding of the symbolism and purpose** that the various items being used held. The meticulous effort that Barking Spider has put into each room is evident. You could easily spend half an hour in the one location, **discovering new pieces, seeing things from different perspectives and mulling over the effect** a particular room or item has had on you.

House of Dreams is both joyful and saddening. It is filled with hope and also loneliness, but the story you choose to create is completely in your own hands. While **I can still vividly recall so many of the striking items** on display, the experience of walking through The Collection, and more specifically, doing so under Barking Spider's curating, made it feel like a dream in itself – and one that **I am keen to re-visit** over the coming months.

The Johnston Collection runs daily tours of *House of Dreams* until 20 September.

For booking details please visit The Johnston Collection website (<https://www.johnstoncollection.org>).



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