

POTTER
MUSEUM
OF ART

Ngarn Wa'ngal

BREATHING FOR US

Art of the gum tree

10 July – 21 Nov 2026
Artwork Labels

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Ngarn Wa'ngal: Art of the gum tree explores the eucalypt as a source of creative inspiration in Australian art. 'Ngarn wa'ngal' is Woi Wurrung for 'breathing for us', a title that recognises the intrinsic relationship between trees and people. From dense forests, open plains, sub-alpine mountains and arid deserts to our cities and suburbs, the gum tree connects us to this land and shapes who we are.

Over three floors, this exhibition traces the gum tree across art and culture: as a living being central to First Nations identity, an unfamiliar tree of fascination to early European botanists, a witness to the impacts of colonisation, a symbol of national identity, and a familiar backdrop to our daily lives. It also presents artistic responses to the environmental threats facing eucalypts today, and to their resilience. Together, the works of art encourage reflection on Indigenous sovereignty, Australian identity, our environment and climate, as well as the reach of the gum tree beyond this continent.

This exhibition draws upon the University of Melbourne's collections together with significant local and interstate loans.

Continued overleaf

Eucalypts are indigenous to Australia, with over 900 identified species and subspecies – from towering giants and gnarled ancients to delicate multi-trunked mallees and hardy shrubs. Some eucalypts, like the river red gum, are found throughout much of the country, while many species grow naturally only in restricted areas. A small number of species cross over to Southeast Asia, New Guinea and New Britain, with fewer than five species endemic outside Australia. The gum trees that grow elsewhere – now on every continent except Antarctica – are the result of human distribution in recent centuries.

The European taxonomic classification ‘eucalyptus’ – from the Greek for ‘well-covered’, describing the capped flower buds – was first used in 1788. Eucalypts are divided into several genera, notably *Eucalyptus*, *Angophora*, *Corymbia* and the recently proposed *Blakella*. For this exhibition, the overarching name ‘gum tree’ is used for all eucalypts. However, these trees have many names: taxonomic, such as *Eucalyptus viminalis*; common, including manna gum, ghost gum and stringybark; and age-old: wurun, biyal, wirrangga, pilpira, purnu, gadayka, karri, mottlecah, coolabah, jarrah and hundreds more.

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Special thanks: Uncle Bill Nicholson, Aunty Kim Wandin,
Judith Ryan, Kade McDonald, Lisa Slade, Mike Bayly

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Bosisto's
FIRST IN EUCALYPTUS SINCE 1852

Acknowledgement of Country

The Potter is situated on the unceded land of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people. We recognise and respect the role that art, image-making, storytelling and oral traditions have held in maintaining a continuous culture that goes back over 65,000 years.

Gum trees have stood on the lands of Traditional Custodians for countless generations. They are part of living, breathing Country that was never ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and to the enduring knowledge systems that continue to be practised, maintained and shared across this continent, despite great adversity.

Throughout this exhibition, some of the words and works of art reflect the history and the attitudes of the time in which they were written or created.

Please be advised: some of the works of art in this exhibition refer to the displacement and massacre of First Nations peoples, as well as environmental destruction and catastrophic events including bushfires. We urge visitors to take care when viewing.

Always

First Nations peoples across this continent have always lived alongside gum trees as equals and partners. These trees are not simply within the landscape. They *are* Country, and Country speaks through them. Each gum tree tells a story.

Eucalypts mark songlines, ceremony, birthing places and burial sites, and provide medicine, tools, shelter and habitat. Their smoke cleanses, their roots find water, and their blossoms signal when to harvest and when to hunt. The trunks, hollows and modified limbs of gum trees carry the memories of generations – open archives holding knowledge older than any written record.

For the Wurundjeri people, the manna gum is so central to identity that it lives within their name – ‘wurun’ is the tree and ‘djeri’ the grub that makes its home inside it.

The relationships between First Nations peoples and trees are ongoing, maintained and renewed in every generation. The works of art in this room express this deep connection and continuity.

Lewis Wandin-Bursill

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, born 1999

Dagan biik

2023

eucalyptus, mistletoe, pyrography

Courtesy of the artist and Murrup Biik Public Art, Narrm / Melbourne

Drawn with fire, these designs follow the traditions of nineteenth-century Wurundjeri leader and artist William Barak, a direct ancestor of artist Lewis Wandin-Bursill.

Carrying ancestral patterns into contemporary cultural practice, these dagans, or hunting clubs, are carved from the bulbous growths that form when mistletoe, a parasitic plant, attaches itself to the branches of eucalyptus trees. Wandin-Bursill salvages the distinctive protrusions, then shapes and adorns them with designs burned into the wood's surface. Through woodcarving, an integral part of Aboriginal culture, Wandin-Bursill honours Country and his ancestors.

Jazz Money

Wiradjuri, born 1992

in embrace

2026

single-channel digital video, colour, sound, 42:00 min; vinyl

Courtesy of the artist and The Commercial, Sydney
Miegunyah Creative Fellowship commission, 2026

Jazz Money is a Wiradjuri poet, artist and filmmaker whose cross-disciplinary practice is rooted in language, narrative and First Nations legacies of place. Through poetry and art, Money honours the past while carrying responsibility into the future, sustaining the oral traditions of First Nations storytelling – a living instrument of care on and for this continent. In many First Nations cultures, including the artist's Wiradjuri culture, smoke is used to mark moments of ceremony and significance. Here they are inspired by the act of welcoming a new baby to the world with the burning of green gumleaves.

Money's voice can be heard softly reading their poem.

in embrace

every breath touches the next in this exhale

the trees gift us

there are currents flowing above our heads

rising from the leaf the bud the blossom the tended fire

head bowed as the ancient branch

dipping towards the tender smoke

cradled baby welcomed new in always

wrapped in the curled leaf scent

our knowings held in loving soil grown in ancient song

cared for since the time of seeds and carried into every future

slow smoke glimpsed through moonlight

in misted morning giving way

to the dew drop caught in sun beam

this breath exhaling out from all our ridges valleys and peaks

in embrace of these journeyed air ways

connecting all this place from the breeze on far horizon

to the wisps caressing soft new cheek

Christian Thompson

Bidjara, born 1978

Black gum 2

from the series *Australian graffiti*

2007

type C photograph

National Gallery of Victoria

Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2008

In *Australian graffiti*, Christian Thompson photographs himself wearing sculptural headpieces made from Australian native flowers, including eucalyptus blossom. The series turns on the use of 'Australian native', a term once used to classify both Indigenous peoples and the continent's flora and fauna, linking the two under the colonial gaze. Thompson reclaims the eucalypt by restoring it as a flourishing expression of his Indigenous identity.

Naomi Hobson

Kaantju/Umpila, born 1979

**Nicholl Kepple Jnr, A Warrior without a
Weapon #3**

from the series *A Warrior without a Weapon*

2018

pigment print on paper

Courtesy of the artist and Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne

Nici Cumpston

Barkindji, born 1963

Barka shelter

2025

pigment inkjet print on paper on aluminium

Courtesy of the artist and Michael Reid Gallery, Sydney

One of the greatest privileges I have is to be able to walk on my ancestors' Country, taking the time to feel, smell and sense them guiding me. Huge ancient trees embody the spirits of our people.

This tree presented itself to me along the banks of the Barka in the Kinchega National Park. I was so excited to come across it, I ran to the car to get my camera and made my family wait until I had created the images I felt had done it justice.

When the tree was a sapling, the branches were modified to mould it into this shape. To give you a sense of scale, up to twenty people can fit underneath this shelter. The ingenuity of modifying trees to provide refuge was integral to survival, providing welcome relief with their shade on a hot day and warmth and protection on cold nights and in wet weather.

— Nici Cumpston

Julie Dowling

Badimia, born 1969

Nyining (Spirit tree)

2013

synthetic polymer paint, red ochre and plastic on canvas

Private collection

This picture is about Nyining trees. These spiritual trees have to be older than a human life to become important as signposts and spirit places for men and women in the Noongar Nation. The big, older trees are very rare, as many have been felled by wudjulahs (non-Indigenous people) for the south-west wood industry.

— Julie Dowling

Thelma Austin

Gunditjmara, born 1976

Blak Queens – The journey of an Aboriginal woman connecting with the journey of a gumtree

2022

Bubba crown – Germination and growth

sterling silver

Aunty crown – Flowering

sterling silver, copper

Matriarch crown – Fertilisation and seed release

sterling silver, copper, brass

Courtesy of the artist

Thelma Austin's three crowns trace the life journey of an Aboriginal woman from conception to Eldership, connecting each stage with the life cycle of the gum tree. The *Bubba crown*, in silver, carries the fine, simple details of germination for a child at the start of her life's journey. The *Aunty crown*, rich with markings and hand-cut gum-leaf designs, honours the years of experience, motherhood and growth. The *Elder crown* incorporates silver, copper and bronze, with a backbone etched into the spine of the gum leaf as a tribute to the matriarchs of family and community.

Brian Martin

Muruwari/Bundjalung/Kamilaroi, born 1972

Methexical Countryscape Paakantyi # 18

2020

charcoal on paper

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
Purchased, 2024

The focus of this charcoal drawing is a living subject, a mighty eucalypt growing on Paakantyi (Barkindji) Country in western New South Wales that signifies the Paakantyi people's enduring connection with Country. Martin based this drawing on his photograph of the eucalypt, which he subdivided into thirty equal parts to form a grid of panels that diffracts the image.

Each of the thirty panels drawn is a pronunciation of the abstract, the metaphysical and the immaterial through mark making. The relationship between the panels shifts this abstraction into a presentation of Country, showing the agency that Country holds.

— Brian Martin, 2024

Tali Tali Pompey

Yankunytjatjara, c. 1947–2011

Para

2009

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria
Felton Bequest, 2011

Tali Tali Pompey was born on a sand dune near Aputula community, her name derived from the Yankunytjatjara word ‘tali’, meaning ‘sandhill’. In this work, Pompey differentiates two species revered by Anangu for their enduring shade and beauty: the pilpira or ghost gum (*Corymbia/Blakella aparrerinja*) and the para or marble gum (*Eucalyptus gongylocarpa*). The ghost gum’s smooth, creamy-white bark is rendered in long luminescent brushstrokes, while the marble gum’s darker trunk is distinguished by yellow and white dots. Ghost gums signify the artist’s birthplace, Aputula, while desert gums are abundant in her mother’s Country, Kanpi. The painting holds both places together.

Tjilpi Kunmanara Kankapankatja

Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara, 1930–2012

Para – ghost gum trees

2012

synthetic polymer paint on linen

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased, 2012

Gaypalani Waṇambi

Marrakulu, born 1986

Dawurr

2022

engraved found metal road sign

Powerhouse collection

Purchased 2023

I use recycled or materials that I find on my land. It is in line with my art centre's guiding principle which is, 'if you paint the land, you must use the land'.

– Gaypalani Waṇambi

Taught to paint by her late father, esteemed Yolṇu leader and artist Wukun Waṇambi, Gaypalani Waṇambi comes from a family with a deep, multigenerational connection to gaḍayka, the stringybark gum. In *Dawurr*, she uses a rotary drill to etch narratives onto a road sign collected near the bauxite mines around Yirrkala. The work traces the journeys of Wuyal, the ancestral honey hunter who set out from Gurka'wuy to find a homeland for the Marrakulu people. Wuyal cut the gaḍayka on his travels in search of wild honey. His path shaped the land itself: where the honey flowed, rivers formed and were named. The Marrakulu people bear those names still.

Wendy Hubert

Yindjibarndi, born 1954

Wirlumarra (Ghost gum)

2024

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Private collection

This is a wirlumarra tree at the Wannar-nha River, near Ngurrawaana.

– Wendy Hubert

Wendy Hubert is a distinguished Yindjibarndi Elder from the Western Pilbara region, born on Gurruma Country. A teacher, linguist and artist, she has devoted her life to caring for her Country, or Ngurra, and keeping culture safe for future generations. An active member of Juluwarlu Group Aboriginal Corporation, Hubert has travelled Country documenting language, law and sacred sites. She came to painting in 2017, surprising herself with a practice that became another form of recording and sharing knowledge. Her dynamic works are alive with the colours of the Pilbara – a continuous exchange between the artist and her Country.

Treahna Hamm

Yorta Yorta, born 1965

Barmah nurrtja biganga (Barmah Forest possum-skin cloak)

2005

Australian common brushtail possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*)
skin pelts, synthetic thread, natural earth pigments

National Gallery of Australia
Purchased 2007

The Barmah Forest biganga is of significance. The cloak deeply connects myself with my ancestors who used the same ochre on traditional cloaks over 150 years ago. The cloak tells the story of the Barmah Forest portrayed by the trees, who are spiritual figures and guardians of the Barmah Forest through ancestral, spiritual and cultural connections.

The deep red ochre signifies to me the connection with the red gum forest and its importance. The Yorta Yorta totem is depicted along with the two food sources of the people, the Murray cod and the yabby (river crayfish).

— Treahna Hamm

Atrium

megan evans

Australian, born 1957

Gust

2026

eucalyptus leaves, plastic and metal pins

Courtesy of the artist

Miegunyah Creative Fellowship commission, 2026

Gust is made of hundreds of multicoloured eucalyptus leaves gathered over a thirty-year period. It follows the design of the wind as it moves up the stairs. The black leaves at the climax of the gust are from burnt trees around my mother's house in Chum Creek, which was in the centre of the Black Saturday bushfires. I collected the leaves during the eucalyptus 'autumn', when many fall, which in Boonwurrung seasons is Bullarto nye-wiiny (January–February). I have collected most of the leaves from Boonwurrung Country, where I live, while others have come from Melbourne University campuses across Victoria.

— megan evans

megan evans

Australian, born 1957

Remanence

2026

single-channel digital animation, colour, sound, 07:30 min

Courtesy of the artist

Miegunyah Creative Fellowship commission, 2026

Derived from ‘remanent’ (that which remains), remanence refers to the residual magnetism left in a material after an external magnetic field is removed. It is used in studies of magnetism, such as in paleomagnetism, where it indicates the strength of magnetic fields over geological time. I’ve used ‘remanence’ to suggest the way digital images – here, the leaves that move of their own accord – carry a trace of the physical items they represent.

– megan evans

Magpies carolling, the sound of crunching leaves and pobblebonk frogs with attendant bird noises are included at different stages of this animation.

Classification

When the British arrived on the east coast of this continent – in 1770 to chart, in 1788 to invade – they were fascinated by the flora of Australia. Many of the plants were unique and highly sought after by botanists, enthusiasts and nurserymen, particularly if unusual, beautiful or of potential economic benefit. Books with descriptions and illustrations were soon published and widely circulated, as were the plants themselves, collected wherever Europeans travelled, traded and colonised.

European botanists sought to comprehend this abundance through taxonomic classification, with the Linnaean binomial (two-name) system – such as *Eucalyptus globulus* – becoming the standard. In seeking to understand the hierarchy of relationships through the study of leaves, flowers, fruit and seeds, the broader ecological context was ignored and Indigenous cultural knowledge overlooked, despite the frequent assistance of Aboriginal guides, translators and collectors. These plants already had names, in hundreds of First Nations languages, each one carrying knowledge of a plant's place, season and use. To rename them – to insert a specimen into a European framework as though it had no prior identity – was not a neutral act of science but part of the broader project of colonisation: to classify, to collect, to own.

Joseph Banks (collector)

English, 1743–1820

Daniel Solander (collector)

Swedish, 1733–1782, lived in England 1760–82

Eucalyptus platyphylla

(specimen first identified as *Eucalyptus alba*)

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

In April 1770 the crew of HMS *Endeavour*, under the command of Lieutenant James Cook, landed at a bay called Kamay by its Gweagal and Gamayngal custodians. On board was the wealthy naturalist Joseph Banks, aided by his botanist Daniel Solander and artist Sydney Parkinson. As a result of the abundant unfamiliar plants they encountered, the British renamed Kamay ‘Botany Bay’. They collected specimens of eucalypts there and along the eastern coast, with Banks noting their sap and leaves ‘hanging down like those of the weeping willow’. This specimen of poplar gum (*Eucalyptus platyphylla*, ‘flat leaved’) was taken by Banks and Solander from Waalumbaal Birri (Endeavour River, northern Queensland) on Guugu Yimidhirr Country, while the *Endeavour* was being repaired after striking a reef.

Frederick Polydore Nodder

(draughtsman? and engraver)

English, active c. 1773–1800

Bark of the red gum tree

plate 25 in John White's *A Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*, J. Debrett, London, 1790
hand-coloured engraving on paper

The University of Melbourne, Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections
Bequest of Sir Russell Grimwade

The first illustrations of gum trees published after Sydney was established in 1788 appeared in John White's *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales* (1790), among sixty-five engraved plates depicting birds, animals, reptiles and plants. Plates 23 and 25 show the leaves and clustered fruits of 'the peppermint tree' (named *Eucalyptus piperita*), and the rough bark and pointed operculum (cap) of a 'red gum tree' (*Eucalyptus resinifera*, 'resin bearing'). Surgeon General of the colony, White soon realised the medicinal properties of eucalypts, with the gum alleviating dysentery and the oil in the leaves found to be 'efficacious in removing all cholicky [stomach-y] complaints' – properties long familiar to First Nations people.

Colonial expansion across Australia began to reveal the great diversity of eucalypt species to settlers and the world more broadly. Today, Linnaean taxonomy remains an important scientific tool that is constantly evolving, with new input offered by technologies such as DNA testing. This approach is strengthened by the consideration of location, climate and local knowledge as well as the integration of First Nations knowledge systems.

Pierre Joseph Redouté (draughtsman)

Belgian 1759–1840, lived in France 1782–1840

Francois Hubert (engraver)

French, 1744–1809

Eucalyptus obliqua

plate 20 from Charles-Louis L'Héritier de Brutelle's, *Sertum Anglicum, seu plantae rariores quae in hortis juxta Londinium* (*The English Garland, or Rarer Plants which Grow in Gardens Near London*), P.-F. Didot, Paris, 1788

engraving on paper

State Library of Victoria

The first European scientific description using the taxonomic name *eucalyptus* was published in 1788 by the wealthy French botanist Charles-Louis L'Heritier de Brutelle, who had access to Joseph Banks's collection. His book included this engraving of *Eucalyptus obliqua* (messmate stringybark) – the first print depicting a eucalypt – and was based upon specimens and seeds taken from Kaparati / Adventure Bay in Lutruwita / Tasmania in 1774, on Cook's second voyage to the Pacific. *E. obliqua* was one of the first gums to be grown in England and the first to be commercially available at nurseries. Such was the interest in Australian plants that a pamphlet 'Rules for Collecting and Preserving Seeds from Botany Bay' was printed in 1787 for those travelling on the First Fleet.

Artist's name unknown (draughtsman)

lived in New South Wales, 1790s

James Sowerby (engraver)

English, 1757–1822

Eucalyptus robusta

plate XIII in James Edward Smith's *A Specimen of the Botany of New Holland*, J. Sowerby, London, 1793

hand-coloured engraving on paper

The University of Melbourne, Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections
Bequest of Sir Russell Grimwade

A Specimen of the Botany of New Holland (1793–95), by the pre-eminent English botanist James Edward Smith, is the first publication dedicated to Australian flora. Smith sought to present 'a specimen of the riches of this mine of botanical novelty ... of a country of which they have lately heard so much about'. He explained: 'The figures are taken from coloured drawings, made on the spot ... along with a most copious and finely preserved collection of dried specimens, with which the drawings have in every case been carefully compared.' His text often noted who was the first to grow these plants in England, with kudos given to those who succeeded.

Pierre-Joseph Redouté (draughtsman)

Belgian 1759–1840, lived in France 1782–1840

Charles-Marie-François Dien (engraver)

French, 1787–1865

Eucalyptus cornuta

plate 20 from Jacques-Julien Houtou de Labillardière's
*Atlas pour servir à la Relation du voyage à la recherche de
La Pérousee (Atlas to accompany the Voyage in Search of
La Pérouse)*, H. J. Jansen, Paris, 1800

engraving on paper

Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria

Purchased with funds from the Ferry Foundation, 2011

European knowledge about Australia's rich biodiversity developed exponentially after British colonisation, with well-equipped French, Spanish and English expeditions returning to their countries laden with specimens for classification, publication and potentially propagation. Jacques-Julien Houtou de Labillardière, botanist on the French d'Entrecasteaux expedition (1791–93), undertook intensive collecting in southern Western Australia and Lutruwita / Tasmania, amassing some 4,000 plants. Labillardière recalled, 'We were filled with admiration at the sight of these ancient [Tasmanian] forests ... The eye was astonished in contemplating the prodigious size of these trees.' Labillardière's account, with illustrations by the talented botanical artist Pierre-Joseph Redouté, was immediately republished in English for eager readers.

Emil Todt (draughtsman)

German, c. 1810–1900, lived in Australia 1849–1900

Charles Trodel (lithographer)

German, 1835–1906, lived in Australia 1860–1906

Eucalyptus globulus

in Ferdinand von Mueller's *Eucalyptographia: A Descriptive Atlas of the Eucalypts of Australia and the Adjoining Islands* (decade 6), John Ferris, Govt. Printer, Melbourne, 1880
lithograph on paper

The University of Melbourne, Rare Books Collection,
Archives and Special Collections

Ferdinand von Mueller made a prodigious contribution to Australian botany. Arriving in Australia in 1847, he was appointed Victorian government botanist (1853) and became the first director of the Melbourne Botanic Gardens (1857). An indefatigable correspondent, researcher and explorer, he travelled widely, collecting and publishing, and encouraged the industrial and medicinal uses of Australian plants. He is remembered for his promotion of eucalypts, writing his ten-volume *Eucalyptographia: A Descriptive Atlas of the Eucalypts of Australia and the Adjoining Islands* (1879–84), and sending seeds to numerous locations abroad, notably *Eucalyptus globulus* (Tasmanian or southern blue gum). This species causes significant environmental challenges in many countries.

John William Lewin

English, 1770–1819, worked in Australia 1800–19

Warty-face honey-sucker (Regent honeyeater)

plate III in his *A Natural History of the Birds of New South Wales*, J. H. Bohte, London, 1822

hand-coloured etching on paper

The University of Melbourne, Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections

Like several enterprising botanists and gardeners, artist John Lewin travelled to Australia specifically for its natural history. The first professional artist to freely travel to the colony, he arrived in Sydney in 1800, initially studying birds and insects. Unlike previous artists, who typically depicted specimens on an otherwise blank sheet, Lewin illustrated the creatures in their relationship with plants. His watercolours and his etchings (the first made in Australia) are therefore equally botanical and zoological observations. The ‘Warty-face honey-sucker’– the now critically endangered regent honeyeater – is shown here among the eucalyptus blossom it feeds upon.

Edward Dalton Smith (draughtsman)

English, 1800–1883

Artist's name unknown (engraver)

active England, 1820s

Eudesmia tetragona

plate 21 in Robert Sweet's *Flora Australasica, or, A selection of handsome, or curious plants, natives of New Holland, and the South Sea islands*, James Ridgway, London, 1827–28
hand-coloured engraving on paper

The University of Melbourne, Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections
Bequest of Sir Russell Grimwade

Part of the attraction of plants introduced to Europe was the challenge of growing them in climates often wildly different to their native region. After visiting Australia during the early 1830s, physician–traveller George Bennett described the contemporary paradox where ‘plants from foreign climes, nursed in conservatories’ were venerated in Europe; while to many colonial residents the same plants ‘from their profusion, become annoying weeds’. For his *Flora Australasica*, Robert Sweet could view Australian specimens growing in England, such as this gum, now *Eucalyptus pleurocarpa*, better known as tallerack, grown ‘at the Nursery of M J B Mackay, at Clapham’.

Walter Hood Fitch (draughtsman)

Scottish 1817–1892, lived in England 1841–92

Joseph Swan (lithographer)

English/Scottish 1796–1872

Eucalyptus splachnicarpa
(now *Corymbia calophylla*, marri)

plate 4036 in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*, volume 69, London,
1843

hand-coloured lithograph on paper

Rare Book Collection, Museums Victoria

Walter Hood Fitch (draughtsman)

Scottish, 1817–1892, lived in England 1841–92

Artist's name unknown (lithographer)

active in England 1840s

Eucalyptus macrocarpa (mottlecah)

plate 4333 in *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*, volume 73, London, 1847

hand-coloured lithograph on paper

Museums Victoria

Curtis's Botanical Magazine was founded in London in 1787, one of many natural history journals published as literacy and imperial enquiry expanded from the late eighteenth century on. Remarkably, it continues to be published today, still with precise botanical illustrations. *Eucalyptus splachnicarpon* is now known as *Corymbia calophylla*, but is usually called 'marri', its Noongar name. Also from Western Australia, mottlecah (*Eucalyptus macrocarpa*) is famed for its sculptural grey leaves and spectacular large flowers and fruit. Its seeds were sent to England before 1841 by Georgiana Molloy, an amateur but enthusiastic botanical collector valued by British botanists for many such 'acquisitions'.

Sydney Parkinson (draughtsman)

English, c. 1745–1771

Frederick Polydore Nodder (final draughtsman)

English, active c. 1773–1800

Robert Blyth (engraver)

English, 1750–1784

***Eucalyptus alba* (or *Eucalyptus platyphylla*)**

plate 121 from *Banks' Florilegium*, part VI: Australia

Eucalyptus crebra

plate 120 from *Banks' Florilegium*, part VI: Australia

drawn 1770, painted 1778, printed 1981 by Alecto Historial Editions, London

colour engraving and etchings (à la poupée) with hand colouring on paper

National Gallery of Victoria

Presented by Rio Tinto Limited through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2013

On board HMS *Endeavour*, Sydney Parkinson sketched hundreds of the plants, fish, birds and other creatures collected by Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander. Many of his drawings remained unfinished when he died en route to England, aged 26. Back in London, Banks employed natural history artists such as Frederick Polydore Nodder to complete

Continued overleaf

the watercolours, and skilful engravers to transfer the images to copper plates for printing. This ambitious project took many years but petered out as Banks's attention moved on to other interests. As a result, the 743 plates remained unprinted until the twentieth century, with the complete set finally printed in colour in the 1980s. The two eucalypts depicted were taken from Darumbal Country, while several more eucalypt species were collected.

Janet Laurence

Australian, born 1947

An Incantation for a Eucalypt

2026

Courtesy of the artist

Miegunyah Creative Fellowship commission, 2026

Bringing you the wonder and world of a tree.

Images, stories, matter, and fragments of our beloved eucalypts are gathered here.

A wunderkammer has been crafted from the wood of seven eucalyptus trees that hold archival materials and rare books from the University of Melbourne, along with tree oils and essences from the Victorian Herbarium and the Medical Museum.

Botanical fragments and objects from the forest and my studio are woven into these collections, forming an incantation and an alchemical transformation of nature into art.

— Janet Laurence

Continued overleaf

Shelving made by Paul Masson of Prop Art, comprising:
blackbutt (*Eucalyptus pilularis*)
grey ironbark (*Eucalyptus paniculata*)
mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*)
red ironbark (*Eucalyptus sideroxylon*)
river red gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*)
spotted gum (*Eucalyptus maculata*)
Victorian ash (*Eucalyptus regnans* or *Eucalyptus delegatensis*)

In addition to gumnuts, barks, seeds, glass vessels and artworks, photographs, books and other material from the artist's collection, items in this display include:

Second row

Reproductions printed on timber:

The Gum Tree: Official Organ of the Australian Forest League (Victorian Branch) 1918

The University of Melbourne Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections. Bequest of Russell Grimwade

Reproduction printed on brushed aluminium:

A Research on the Eucalypts, Especially in Regard to their Essential Oils by Richard T. Baker and Henry G. Smith, 1902

The University of Melbourne Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections. Bequest of Russell Grimwade

Book:

The Australian Roadside by Edna Walling, 1952

(private collection)

Continued overleaf

Third row

Specimens:

Eucalypt samples from the **H.T. Wardle Wood Specimen Collection** 1890–1930

The University of Melbourne, Creswick Campus Historical Collection

Book:

Australian Plants Suitable for Gardens, Parks, Timber Reserves, etc. by William Guilfoyle, 1911

The University of Melbourne Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections. Bequest of Russell Grimwade

Footage:

Edited extract of footage of illegal tree clearing, Queensland

Courtesy of the Wilderness Society, 2019

Reproductions printed on acrylic:

Negatives of ***Eucalypt specimens*** by Russell Grimwade for his ***An Anthography of the Eucalypt*** 1920/1930

The University of Melbourne Archives, Archives and Special Collections

Reproductions printed on brushed aluminium:

Pages from ***Eucalyptographia: A Descriptive Atlas of the Eucalypts of Australia and The Adjoining Islands*** by Ferdinand von Mueller, 1879–84

The University of Melbourne Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections

Continued overleaf

Page from ***Illustrations of the Fruits of Eucalyptus Species, with Alphabetical & Numerical Indices, Covering 465 Species and Varieties***, Australian Forestry and Timber Bureau, 1952

The University of Melbourne Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections. Bequest of Russell Grimwade

Specimens:

Folia Eucalypti from Chemische Fabrik E.Merck (Darmstadt, Germany), c. 1914:

Eucalyptus globulus leaves and gumnuts collected in southern Europe and Australia

The University of Melbourne, Medical History Museum, Gift of the Queenscliffe Maritime Museum, 2017

Bosisto's Oil of Eucalyptus bottle, J. Bosisto & Co Pty Ltd, c. 1900

The University of Melbourne, Medical History Museum

Glass vessels with eucalypt content

Collection of the artist

Fourth row

Books:

The Gum Tree: Official Organ of the Australian Forest League (Victorian Branch) 1918

The University of Melbourne Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections. Bequest of Russell Grimwade

Album of timber veneer samples gifted to Mr & Mrs Grimwade

Lathe was funded by a donation from the Grimwades. Division of Forest Products of the C.S.I.R, 1942
The University of Melbourne Archives, Archives and Special Collections. Bequest of Russell Grimwade

Continued overleaf

Footage:

Extract of film created for the ***Theatre of Trees*** exhibition,
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2019

original footage by the artist, edited by Gary Warner

Extract from ***From the bush to the bungalow***, 1920

Courtesy of National Film and Sound Archives

Specimens:

Eucalyptus oil specimen bottles: *Eucalyptus goniocalyx*,
Eucalyptus leucoxylon, *Eucalyptus fissilis*

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

Eucalyptus oil pearls

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

Eucalyptus consideniana, collected by Russell Grimwade,
1941

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

Reproductions printed on brushed aluminium:

Pages from ***Eucalyptographia: A Descriptive Atlas of
the Eucalypts of Australia and The Adjoining Islands*** by
Ferdinand von Mueller, 1879-84

The University of Melbourne Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections

***A Research on the Eucalypts, Especially in Regard to their
Essential Oils*** by Richard T. Baker and Henry G. Smith, 1902

The University of Melbourne Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections. Bequest of
Russell Grimwade

May Vale

Australian, 1862–1945, lived in Europe 1874–78, 1890–92, 1906–09

**Timber sample (*Eucalyptus oleosa*,
red mallee)**

**Timber sample (*Eucalyptus globulus*,
Tasmanian or southern blue gum)**

**Timber sample (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*,
snowgum or white sallee)**

1885

oil on timber

Museums Victoria

In 1885 May Vale was commissioned to paint Victorian timber samples for the colony's Industrial and Technological Museum. Eighty-four samples, each painted with foliage, flowers and gumnuts to match the timber, remain in the collection of the Melbourne Museum. Of these, thirty-two are eucalypts. The samples were intended to encourage an appreciation of local timbers, and to highlight the prolific work of government botanist Ferdinand von Mueller. During the 1880s, this collection was displayed in international and intercolonial exhibitions in London, Paris, Adelaide and Melbourne. It is an uncommon example of a woman artist being publicly employed in a botanical field in the nineteenth century

Russell Grimwade

Australian, 1879–1955

Eucalyptus specimen cabinet

c. 1919/1944

eucalypt gumnuts and leaves, cardboard, eucalypt timber, brass

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
The Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequests, 1973

Melbourne-born industrialist and philanthropist Russell Grimwade was a devoted eucalyptophile, planting species of gum trees in his Toorak garden and Frankston farm. He photographed them when they flowered, wrote a book to encourage the appreciation of eucalypts, and also hand-built this cabinet to house his gumnut collection. The drawers reveal an enormous diversity of gumnuts, which he gathered with the assistance of botanist and forestry friends who knew his passion. Grimwade delighted in showing his 'fine collection of unusual eucalypts and gum nuts' to visitors, as reported in the social pages of Melbourne newspapers, and in sharing seeds and spotting eucalypts when he travelled overseas.

Witness

Gum trees are among the longest-living beings on this continent. Many stand today carrying centuries within their roots. They have seen what has come and gone. They have watched the lives, the joys and the deaths of those living among them. The arrival of strangers, the clearing of forests, the lighting of fires both careful and careless. They have seen violence and survival, celebration and silence, destruction and regrowth.

Early colonists across south-eastern Australia encountered expansive forests and trees of unbelievable stature. Encouraged by British expansionist policies, they viewed the land as a resource to use and 'improve'. At their hands, giant trees fell under the axe and saw. Land was cleared for crops and stock, timber used for buildings, fences and fuel. What many perceived as untouched wilderness was in fact something else entirely: grassland between trees was evidence of carefully tended Country, kept in balance for millennia. While concern for Australia's plundered forests grew among settlers, with Australia's first national park created in 1879, what had once been healthy, diverse Country was profoundly changed.

This room, taking its title from Trawlwoolway artist Julie Gough's work of the same name, brings together colonial paintings and contemporary responses. For colonial artists, the environment in the colonies was new and unfamiliar. Many

struggled to depict the irregular forms and open foliage of eucalypts, in paintings shaped by their prior experiences of European landscapes. Contemporary artists confront this history, offering reflections on the colonial actions and industries that laid the foundations for the nation of Australia.

Julie Gough

Trawlwoolway, born 1965

Witness

2021

five-channel 4K video installation, colour, sound, 16:9 ratio

Video editor: Jemma Rea

Collection of the artist

Commissioned by Powerhouse, 2021

In the first forty years after British colonisation began in 1803, the Aboriginal population of Lutruwita (Van Diemen's Land / Tasmania) 'fell' from more than 7000 to fewer than 50 people. In 1830 Lieutenant Governor Arthur ordered pictographic placards be placed on trees to communicate that Tasmanian colonists and Aboriginal people who attacked the other would receive equal justice, but no colonist was charged with our Ancestors' murders. Hundreds of attacks against colonists by Aboriginal people were recorded, while only a few dozen against Aboriginal people have surfaced. The gaps and silences in history written by the victors compelled my ongoing journey to map and record our erased history, witnessed by old trees that still stand at the sites of our devastation.

– Julie Gough

The sounds of bird calls, insects, water running, wind in trees, cattle and other ambient noises accompany this work of art.

Robert Campbell Junior

Ngaku/Dhunghutti, 1944–1993

Initiation tree

1981

enamel paint on cardboard

National Gallery of Victoria

Purchased through the NGV Foundation with the assistance of

The Marjory and Alexander Lynch Endowment, Governors, 2005

Eucalypts are both witnesses and participants in cultural life. Larger species bear evidence of bark removal for containers, shields and canoes, or display branches shaped across generations as markers of Country. Across Wiradjuri and Gamilaroi Country, living trees are carved with symbolic designs – dramatic chevrons, concentric diamonds and dynamic spirals – to mark ceremonial and burial sites.

One of Robert Campbell Junior's earliest works, *Initiation tree* depicts a specific and culturally significant dendroglyph, or carved tree, from the Kempsey area, which was severed from the ground by anthropologists and deposited in the Australian Museum, Sydney. Two initiates adorned with body paint carve sacred diamond designs into the trunk of the living tree. Emu tracks, a recurring motif in Campbell's work, crisscross the surrounding landscape.

Many carved trees removed from Country and held in museum collections in Australia and internationally for their 'protection' still await repatriation.

Eugene von Guérard

Austrian, 1811–1901, lived in Italy 1830–38, Germany 1838–52, Australia 1852–82, Germany 1882–91, England 1891–1901

Golden Point Ballarat and flat, with part of Black Hill as in July 1853

1874

oil on canvas

Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria
Gift of James Oddie, 1891

The gold rushes of the 1850s led to prosperity in the colonies of Victoria and New South Wales but caused cultural disruption and environmental devastation. The colonists cleared vast areas of land, using timber and bark for firewood, buildings and mine-shafts. They dug over soil, redirected watercourses and left polluted slagheaps. The impact of this mining is still evident today. Artist Eugene von Guérard arrived in Australia in 1852, among tens of thousands of hopeful prospectors. His short time on the goldfields was formative for his art, as he explored the distinctive appearance of gums with their open foliage and meandering branches. Numerous studies survive, including the original drawing for this scene, which would have been viewed by colonists as one of productive industry.

Alexander Schramm

German, 1813–1864, lived in Australia 1849–64

The Gilbert family

1864

oil on canvas, mounted on board

Art Gallery of South Australia
Gift of W. A. Gilbert 1970

In nineteenth-century Australian art, gigantic eucalypts with hollow bases were presented both as objects of awe and as backdrops for settler–colonist self-imaging. Pastoralist and founding Barossa vine grower Joseph Gilbert commissioned Alexander Schramm to depict his family posed around, and within, this giant tree, rather than in his formal gardens or orchards. The Aboriginal man, possibly Peramangk or Ngadjuri, shown tending the pony, and the dead possum carried triumphantly in the settler's mouth, further the depiction of colonial dominance. Gilbert's estate Pewsey Vale continues as a winery today; the ancient tree, hollowed by fires, was subsequently lost to fire.

Joshua Wickett Gliddon

Australian, 1887–1971

(Blackbutt tree, Boolarra, Gippsland)

1901

gelatin silver photograph

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
The Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequests, 1973

According to the inscription on this photograph, this *Eucalyptus regnans* at Boolarra, Gippsland (known locally as blackbutt),

was one of three large ones growing together on a hillside ... Probably well over a century old, and hollowed out by bushfires many years earlier, it was believed to have provided shelter for [Gunaikurnai people] ... Having been dead for about 20 years, it fell shortly after, and the trunk which was without limbs for the first 100 feet [30 metres], could easily have had a vehicle driven along it for that distance. It was the last of the big trees in that district.

Narelle Jubelin

Australian, born 1960, lives in Spain 1996–

A fallen monarch

1987

cotton embroidery threads, found wood mount, frame,
perspex

National Gallery of Australia

Gift of the Philip Morris Arts Grant 1988

Throughout her career Narelle Jubelin has created small-scale works as ‘fragments’ of larger concerns: national histories and hierarchies, exploration and exploitation. In and around 1988, the year gripped by bicentennial eulogising of two hundred years of colonisation, Jubelin created a series of works transposing historical artifacts depicting male domination of their environment into detailed embroideries, using the feminised parlour craft of petit point, or ‘small stitches’. In rendering black and white into colour, expansive landscapes into fine stitches, she encourages us to question the interpretation of historical records, what was not recorded, and by whom.

Narelle Jubelin

Australian, born 1960, lives in Spain 1996–

Leo Wimmer (carver)

Austrian/Australian, 1937–

A box Brownie

1988

cotton embroidery threads, wood

National Gallery of Australia

Gift of the Philip Morris Arts Grant 1988

Sera Waters

Australian, born 1979

Suckers: Coat of (lopped) Arms

2021

found gumnuts, vintage linen, various threads

Courtesy of the artist and Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide
Commissioned by Powerhouse, 2021

Since colonisation, eucalypts have knotted with Australian history; a narrative regularly trimmed, lopped, and made productive for national identity and economy. As symbols of Australianness, eucalypts have been co-opted into settler colonial needlework traditions. Rarely though have colonial truths – trauma, damage and aftermaths – been embroidered upon doilies, aprons or samplers. *Suckers: Coat of (lopped) Arms* uses embroidery and gumnut craft to tell these unsettling ongoing truths about extensive damage inflicted upon this Country rich with ancient roots. Suckers and roots embody how eucalypts are resilient survivors, who under trying circumstances, limited resources and loss, prosper, share and care.

– Sera Waters

John Glover

English, 1767–1849, lived in Australia 1831–49

Patterdale landscape with cattle

c. 1833

oil on canvas

The National Gallery of Australia and the National Library of Australia
Rex Nan Kivell Collection

Already an accomplished artist of high repute, John Glover arrived in Van Diemens Land (Lutruwita / Tasmania) on his 64th birthday to 'take up' land with his family. Glover is often criticised for his depiction of unnaturally sinuous gums. Yet this and other paintings, together with numerous tiny sketches he made of black or swamp gums (*Eucalyptus ovata*) and white or manna gums (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) growing on his property Patterdale, show that he developed a deep knowledge of the gums' distinctive shapes, and chose when to depict them naturalistically and when more romantically. Here, the open grassland between the trees that so appealed to British sensibilities and pastoral ambitions is evidence of centuries of cultural burning. The colonists had little understanding or appreciation of this sustainable practice.

William Ford

English, 1823–1884, lived in Australia 1871–84

At the Hanging Rock

1875

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria
Purchased, 1950

As colonial settlers became more comfortable in their circumstances, and as transportation developed, sightseeing became a leisure activity, with people travelling ‘in search of natural beauties’. Once the train line from Melbourne reached Woodend in 1861, daytrippers flocked to Ngannelong /

Hanging

Rock. There, it was reported in 1874, ‘people clamber up the hill in thousands and explore the labyrinths formed by the complication of rocks’, just as they do now, with many unaware of its sacred significance. This 1875 painting by William Ford influenced Joan Lindsay’s novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967), which implicated the location, and the Australian bush itself, as sites of unsettling mystery.

Hal Missingham

Australian, 1906–1994

Graffiti and scribble gum

1971

silver gelatin photograph

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased 1974

Henry Gritten

English, 1818–1873, lived in the United States 1850–53, Australia 1853–73

The Merri Creek near Dights Falls

c. 1863

oil on canvas

The University of Melbourne Art Collection

Purchased through the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Fund, 2023

This site, downstream from Heidelberg Road bridge in Clifton Hill, shows some of the large river red gums that line Merri Creek and the way the valley was being used for watering and grazing. Like the Louis Buvelot painting to your left, Gritten's painting was translated into a wood engraving for illustrated newspapers, with tranquil pastoral scenes like this promoting an aesthetic appreciation of the Australian landscape.

But colonial uses of land forced Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people from their waterways. Not far from this site, in 1840, a gathering of 300–400 Aboriginal people was brutally disrupted by soldiers, with mass arrests and the murder of several resistance leaders.

Henry Gritten

English, 1818–1873, lived in the United States 1850–53, Australia 1853–73

Melbourne from the Botanical Gardens

1865

oil on canvas

The University of Melbourne Art Collection

Purchased through the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Fund, 2018

The Melbourne Botanic Gardens were established in 1846 on the southern banks of the Birrarung / Yarra River, encompassing land and wetlands that had long sustained the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung people. These seasonal waters were subsequently made into lagoons, just as the ancient gum trees were appropriated as sources of shade while the introduced exotic trees grew. Two pre-invasion gums remain in the gardens today, together with numerous species of eucalypts gathered from across the continent.

Louis Buvelot

Swiss, 1814–1888, lived in Brazil 1835–52, Australia 1865–88

Gisborne Hill from the slopes of Mount Macedon

1875

oil on canvas mounted on board

Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria

Dr J. A. Neptune Scott Bequest Fund, 1958

Our rocks and mountains, our pastures and creeks, are always characteristic, but the eucalyptus is the most characteristic of all; and in depicting its weird aspects and contorted ramification, Mr. Buvelot is always happy and successful. He seems to be thoroughly imbued with Australian nature, which he so fondly depicts, and his pencil is never so eloquent as when it gives the gumtree the prominence which is due to it as the sign manual of our landscape.

– *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers*, 1875

This painting was exhibited to much praise in 1875, as this review demonstrates. Buvelot's ability to capture the gnarled and untidy nature of gums and make them appealing was hugely influential on the next generation of Melbourne artists, including Frederick McCubbin and Arthur Streeton.

Alfred Sells

English, 1822–1908, lived in Australia 1876–88

(Gum trees in South Australia)

in his *Album of sketches*, 1876–79

1878

watercolour over pencil

National Gallery of Australia
Purchased 2010

Europeans in Australia had mixed responses to eucalypts – many admired their various forms and impressive stature, while others found them gloomy and monotonous. Alfred Sells, an Anglican minister who served at Lyndoch in South Australia's Barossa Valley from 1878 to 1884, clearly appreciated them. This album, filled with small watercolours, shows his enjoyment of the hills and valleys on Peramangk and Ngadjuri Country. One page shows the massive, hollowed gum depicted by Alexander Schramm (displayed to your right), on a property Sells visited regularly as minister. Its local fame was like that accorded to notable oaks and other ancient trees in Europe that were visited in an early form of 'big tree tourism'

A. W. Eustace

English, 1820–1907, lived in Australia 1851–1907

(Eucalyptus leaf painting)

(Eucalyptus leaf painting)

1850s–1907

oil on *Eucalyptus polyanthemos* leaves

Collection of John Daniels, Heathcote, Victoria

Alfred William Eustace – taxidermist, shepherd, musician, house decorator and sign writer – is credited as the first artist to use eucalypt leaves as a ‘bush canvas’. To begin with, it was out of necessity but later he continued to use them for their novelty and appeal, painting miniature bush vignettes on large, round juvenile leaves. Eustace exhibited his painted leaves in Australia and at the 1886 Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London, sending some as a gift to Queen Victoria, who was apparently ‘much pleased’. Several other artists, including Emma Minnie Boyd, also painted similar scenes on gum leaves.

Frederick McCubbin

Australian, 1855–1917

Lost

1886

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria
Felton Bequest, 1940

In 1885, twelve-year-old Clara Crosbie was lost in the upper Yarra Valley, Wurundjeri Country, for twenty-one days. Her much-publicised story is one of many similar accounts, many of which ended tragically. Narratives of children lost in the bush appeared in a wide variety of media from the mid nineteenth century onwards, from painting to poems to pantomime. Painted in 1886, Frederick McCubbin's *Lost* draws upon this narrative, reflecting a dichotomy felt by many settler-colonists between their growing affinity with the Australian bush and anxiety about being in it. Nevertheless, this was bush already damaged by colonists and familiar to McCubbin, who camped regularly at Box Hill with his artist friends.

Dianne Jones

Ballardong, Noongar, born 1966

The hidden

2011

inkjet print on paper

Courtesy of the artist

Photographed on York Reserve on Ballardong Noongar Country, Jones's haunting image captures the ritual of caregivers hiding children among the protective gums, out of the sight of 'welfare' officials who came to remove Aboriginal children from their families.

This image is about the stories from my Mum of her experience of being aware of a 'lookout' for the welfare car. Whenever it was seen there was fear and terror and the response was to call out to the children 'Balay Nyidyang' which meant 'watch out - white people' and then yell and encourage running, hiding because they were coming to take the children.

– Dianne Jones

Artist's name not recorded

Broad shield

19th century

wood, earth pigments

National Gallery of Victoria

Purchased, National Cultural Heritage Fund, 2009

Artist's name not recorded

Broad shield, Upper Murray, southeast Australia

early 19th century

carved hardwood, pipe clay, earth pigments

The University of Melbourne Art Collection

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by D'Lan Davidson, 2022

Once cut from a tree, the timber or bark of a shield takes on a new life – one of protection, strength and defence. As it is stripped away, the tree lives on, adapting to the mark left behind. Each shield bears designs specific to its maker and place: incised herringbone and zigzag patterns, interlocking diamond and meander motifs that encode identity, law and belonging.

Shields are objects of power and prestige, used to protect warriors in disputes, carried in ceremony and traded between groups. Following invasion, the use of shields as objects of protection, ceremony and resistance took on new urgency in the Frontier Wars. During this period, they also became objects of curiosity – stolen or bartered, often finding themselves a long way from home

Artist's name not recorded

Parrying shield

19th century

wood, earth pigments

National Gallery of Victoria
Felton Bequest, 2011

Level 1

Joan Ross

Scottish/Australian

Colonial grab

2015

single-channel digital video animation, colour, sound, 07:32 min

sound and animation: Josh Raymond

Courtesy of the artist and N.Smith Gallery, Sydney

In this video we play the poker machine aptly named ‘Colonial grab’. Through this game we look at colonisation and its legacies, globalisation, consumerism, ownership, environment, and greed.

The odds tho, always in the House’s favour.

In my favourite scene, whole trees, from John Glover’s nineteenth-century painting, with the Indigenous peoples still in them, are plucked and arranged, Ikebana-style, by a colonial woman wearing signature hi-vis, in an act of total disregard and disrespect, reflective of the times, and in my opinion clearly apparent in the twenty-first century.

– Joan Ross

Throughout this animation we can hear the hum of people in a club, poker machines, crows, magpies and currawongs calling, insects buzzing and droning, footsteps, fire crackling, glass shattering and ambient bush sounds.

A sense of place

Gum trees line our freeways, shade our streets and backyards, and stand across our parks, paddocks and forests. Their silhouette is unmistakeable, and for many Australians so familiar that they almost disappear into the backdrop of daily life. It is often only when we leave that we notice what they mean to us – catching the scent of a eucalypt on a foreign street and being reminded, suddenly, of home.

This familiarity has been built over generations. Since the late nineteenth century, settler Australians have looked to the gum tree as a marker of national identity – tough, native and resolute. The Australian Impressionists planted it firmly within the national iconography, painting the eucalypt as the tree against which a sense of home could be constructed. With the federation of the six colonies in 1901, the gum tree was embraced as an emblem of the new nation. Through two world wars, gum leaves were sent to loved ones serving abroad. Across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, artists have continued to paint, print, photograph and be inspired by these trees, with each generation reshaping what the gum tree stands for.

For many people who have migrated to Australia, the gum tree is part of finding their footing in an unfamiliar landscape.

For some, eucalypts are already familiar from places as far-flung as in India, the United States of America, Africa, South America and Southern Europe. For others, they are entirely new, markers of how far from home they have come.

The works in this room trace the deepening place of gum trees in the national consciousness and the shifting ways artists have looked at, lived among and connected with these trees.

Arthur Streeton

Australian 1867–1943, lived in England 1897–1919

Near Heidelberg

1890

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria
Felton Bequest, 1943

The Australian Impressionists sought to paint the landscape with a sense of intimacy and ownership, casting off European conventions in favour of something they could call their own. The gum tree became central to this project – an emblem of nationhood, planted firmly within the national iconography. Here, Streeton distils that ambition into a vivid palette of green, gold and blue, with a lone eucalypt standing tall at the composition's centre. At once triumphant and solitary, this symbol became one of the most enduring motifs in Australian painting, its image shaping how generations of Australians saw their country.

Hans Heyesen

German/Australian, 1877–1968

The river bend

1922

watercolour on paper

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
Gift of Dr Samuel Arthur Ewing 1938

The beauty of the gum is a quiet beauty ... It is a poet's tree,
a painter's tree.

– Hans Heyesen, 1914

German-born Hans Heyesen is renowned for his empathetic portrayal of the Australian countryside and, in particular, the stately gums such as those he lived among at Hahndorf, in the Adelaide Hills (Peramangk and Karna Country). Between 1904 and 1932 Heyesen won the prestigious Wynne Prize for landscape painting a record nine times, his admired paintings imparting a reverential approach to the Australian bush as well as a stoic heroism to its rural workers. An early campaigner for protecting and replanting indigenous vegetation, Heyesen depicts native trees and introduced stock coexisting in this tranquil scene, the filtered light lending the gums an almost animate presence.

Hilda Rix Nicholas

Australian 1884–1961, lived in France, England 1907–18, France 1924–26

Canberra from Red Hill

1926

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria
Felton Bequest, 1928

For this panoramic view of the site of Kamberri / Canberra, Hilda Rix Nicholas set her easel in Ngambri and Ngunnawal land at Red Hill, a lookout still popular today. Seen through a screen of eucalypts, the fertile Limestone Plains stretch out between Black Mountain on the left and Mount Ainslie on the right. The Molonglo River winds through what had become grazing land, past unsealed roads and scattered buildings. A row of red roofs marks the first houses of the suburb of Forrest. This is the country of yellow box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*) and Blakely's red gum (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*) and Rix Nicholas has captured their spindly wayward branches, bright new growth and ash-green leaves.

Lefebvre and Sons, Paris

France, 1845–1925

Tiara

c. 1900

silver, gold, topaz

Powerhouse collection

Purchased with funds donated by the Patrons of the Powerhouse, 1984

Art Nouveau was the first truly international modern style with many artists and designers inspired by shapes found in the natural world. Among these was the gum leaf, familiar from eucalypts growing widely in southern Europe and North Africa. The elongated curvature of the gum leaf harmonised perfectly with Art Nouveau's fondness for sinuous curves and patterns. Its impact can especially be seen in French design in the early twentieth century, as in this Paris-made tiara where the naturalistic modelling of the silver gilt leaves contrasts with the abstraction of the topaz buds.

Mildred Lovett

Australian, 1880–1955

Vase with pastoral design of dancing figures by Sydney Long

1909

handpainted porcelain with overglaze decoration

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Purchased 1909

At the Sydney Society of Artists exhibition in 1909, Tasmanian-born Mildred Lovett exhibited this delicately painted vase near its inspiration, a painting by her friend Sydney Long. While Long's *Pastoral*, praised as 'a poem on canvas ... full of light and fairy-like dreaminess', is now missing, the vase was so admired that it was purchased for the Art Gallery of New South Wales collection. Australia's best-known Symbolist artist, Long created luminous landscapes often populated by dancing figures and creatures and – as seen on this vase – the Greek goat-god Pan. Lovett used the vase's simple curve to enhance the slender trunks, which appear like rising smoke.

Lilla Reidy (attributed)

Australian, 1858–1933

Painted gum leaf – Gallipoli

1915

paint on eucalypt leaf

Museums Victoria

Donated by the Victorian Branch, Returned & Services League of Australia Limited (RSL)

During the First World War, the distinctive sickle-shaped gum leaf was often used as a simple signifier of home. Leaves – sometimes with messages written on them – were posted to loved ones serving abroad; they in turn were often surprised to encounter eucalypts growing around the Mediterranean. Branches from these gums were used to decorate tents, burnt for their aromatic smoke or used to infuse the air of hospital wards. In Australia, gum leaves were painted and decorated with patriotically coloured ribbons and sold to raise funds for the war effort, as was the case with this rare surviving example.

May Gibbs

English/Australian, 1877–1969, lived in England and Australia
1900–13

The editor writing his leading article

in *Snugglepot and Cuddlepie: Their Adventures Wonderful*,
Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1918
offset lithograph on paper

The University of Melbourne, Rare Books Collection,
Archives and Special Collections

Born in England and raised in Western Australia, May Gibbs drew on the native flora of her adopted home to create the gumnut baby characters that would define her career. Her wartime bookmarks and postcards, featuring the babies and sentimental verse, captured the national imagination, and *Snugglepot and Cuddlepie*, published in 1918, became one of Australia's most beloved children's books.

Though intended to imbue childhood innocence and fantasy, the idealised white gum-babies worked to indigenise the settler experience within the native landscape. Such a reading aligns with the May's era, when assimilation policies across Australia were in full force.

May Gibbs

English/Australian, 1877–1969

Nuttybub and Nittersing

book cover for *Nuttybug and Nittersing*, Osboldstone & Co., Melbourne, 1923

offset colour lithograph on card

Signor Cicada

in *Gum Blossom Babies*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1916

offset lithograph printed in brown ink on paper

The University of Melbourne, Rare Books Collection, Archives and Special Collections

John Blogg

Canadian/Australian, 1851–1936

The fallen

1925

Queensland maple (*Flindersia brayleyana*)

National Gallery of Victoria

Gift of the family of John Kendrick Blogg, 1976

A manufacturing chemist and poet, John Kendrick Blogg was also an accomplished woodcarver. Through his contributions to exhibitions and arts organisations he gained a reputation for carefully created timber items, and for including Australian plants in his designs. In particular, he depicted eucalypt branches to symbolise his deep distress at the loss of soldiers during the First World War, as in this carving representing the Australian soldiers landing at Gallipoli. Blogg carved into one of his works: 'The leaves of the tree for the healing of the nation.'

Adrian Feint

Australian, 1894–1971

The jetties, Palm Beach

1942

oil on canvas

New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, New South Wales
Gift of Howard Hinton 1942

A painter, printmaker and subtle Surrealist, Adrian Feint is best known for his oil paintings of luxuriant floral arrangements, often oddly situated against sea- or bayside backdrops. Some aspect of this uncanniness persists in his landscapes of Sydney's bays, where he lived, and northern beaches, where he holidayed. There is a sensuous quality to Feint's trees that positions them as protagonists rather than passive components in the landscape. Here the two arching Sydney red gums (*Angophora costata*) framing the composition entwine their branches like lovers' fingers, dramatically offset against the dazzling sea.

Shay Docking

Australian, 1928–1998, lived in Aotearoa New Zealand 1965–71

Fallen angophora (Ku-ring-gai Chase)

1976

Angophoras and Hawkesbury

1975

pencil on paper

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Purchased with funds provided by the Australian Collection

Benefactors' Program 1998

The layers, angles and shadows of volcanic craters, cliffs and rocky beaches captivated Shay Docking, as did plant forms, especially tree trunks, roots and limbs. During the 1970s, she created a series of drawings inspired by the sandstone formations of Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park on the Hawkesbury River north of Sydney, and its distinctive trees (*Angophora costata*): 'With its smooth pink dimpled skin-like bark and gnarled branches, it swirls and spirals in an astonishing way – it looks extremely calligraphic ... Salt sea winds and warm stone urge angophora into more and more fantastic shapes.' Docking often spoke of the energy and natural rhythm she perceived in the weatherworn landscape.

Merric Boyd

Australian, 1888–1959

A red gum

1951

The giant gum tree

1954

colour pencils on paper

National Gallery of Australia

Gift of Arthur, David and Guy Boyd, Lucy Beck and

Mary Nolan in honour of their father Merric Boyd 1975

Merric Boyd sketched throughout his life but in his later years, as his health declined, he turned increasingly from his well-known pottery work to small-scale pencil drawings. He drew his Murrumbeena surroundings constantly, carrying colour pencils tucked in his socks. His idiosyncratic drawings show his close appreciation of local gum trees, their twisted trunks often seen against post-and-rail fences surviving in an increasingly suburban area.

Merric Boyd

Australian, 1888–1959

Pot

1921

ceramic and glaze

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
Gift of the Deakin family, 2011

Merric Boyd is widely recognised as Australia's first studio potter, creating wheel-thrown and hand-modelled forms from 1910. These were characterised by sinuous lines and an earthy charm and were often inspired by Australian plants and animals. As he wrote, 'the use of our own flora and fauna is of the first importance'.

Arthur Boyd

Australian, 1920–1999, lived in England 1959–71, Australia and England 1971–99

Irrigation lake, Wimmera

1950

resin and tempera on composition board

National Gallery of Victoria
Purchased, 1950

In 1950 Arthur Boyd spent a month painting in the Wimmera district of western Victoria, inspired by its endless wheat fields and expansive horizons. His luminous paintings, painted with thin tempera, show the glare and harsh nature of the dry farmland, here backed by Gariwerd / the Grampians, with cockatoos screeching from the dead, dammed trees. The National Gallery of Victoria and the Art Gallery of New South Wales both purchased paintings from Boyd's highly praised exhibition the same year. This painting was subsequently included in the Australian exhibition of Boyd and Arthur Streeton paintings at the 1958 Venice Biennale and later shown in London, contributing to new perceptions of Australia abroad.

Harold Cazneaux

New Zealander/Australian, 1878–1953

Spirit of endurance

1937

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased with the assistance of donors

to the 100 Works for 100 Years Fund 2013

This giant gum tree stands in solitary grandeur on a lonely plateau in the arid Flinders Ranges, South Australia ...

The passing of the years has left it scarred and marked by the elements – storm, fire, water – unconquered, it speaks to us from a Spirit of Endurance. Although aged, its widespread limbs speak of a vitality that will carry on for many more years. One day, when the sun shone hot and strong, I stood before this giant in silent wonder and admiration. The hot wind stirred its leafy boughs, and some of the living elements of this tree passed to me in understanding and friendliness expressing The Spirit of Australia.

– Harold Cazneaux, 1941

Cazneaux's photograph made this tree famous, and it is still visited by thousands of tourists to Ikara / Wilpena Pound.

Hans Heyesen

German/Australian, 1877–1968

Red hills of Aroona, Flinders Ranges

1933

watercolour on paper

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
Gift of Dr Samuel Arthur Ewing 1938

There is something immensely exhilarating when tall white gums tower into the blue heavens – the subtle quality of the edges where they meet the sky – how mysterious.

– Hans Heyesen

Hans Heyesen first visited the Flinders Ranges, Adnyamathanha Country, in 1926 and returned multiple times, captivated by the striking geology, the intense light and the enormous river red gums. At a time when both inland tourism and colour photography were still uncommon, Heyesen's dramatic oil paintings and translucent watercolours were a revelation to city dwellers accustomed to the softer hues of south-eastern Australia. Heyesen's paintings, together with those of his contemporary Albert Namatjira (Heyesen owned two of his watercolours), played a significant role in changing public sentiment towards central Australia.

Vincent Namatjira

Western Aranda, born 1983

King Dingo (salute)

2024

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Private collection, Melbourne

Vincent Namatjira continues in the traditions of his great-grandfather Albert Namatjira, recording Western Aranda Country's red earth, blue ranges and magnificent ghost gums. With characteristic wit, the artist honours the reverence of Albert's landscapes. His towering gums frame a saluting figure dressed in royal regalia but with the head of a dingo. The landscape is reclaimed, the Crown displaced. For Namatjira, the dingo is a protector totem and a symbol of Aboriginal strength and resilience, standing with authority on Country that was never ceded.

Albert Namatjira

Western Aranda, 1901–1959

Ghost gum

c. 1942–45

watercolour, pencil and mica flakes on paper

Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Dr Beverley and Mr Alan Castleman from the Dr Beverley Castleman Collection, 2024

Ghost gums, or ilwempe to Western Aranda peoples, hold deep cultural significance. They are ancestral beings that mark clan boundaries, songlines and ceremony sites, and provide shelter, medicine and sustenance. In Albert Namatjira's watercolours, gums take on an almost human presence: twisted trunks become torsos, branches reach like arms, and bark folds like weathered skin. As a senior custodian of his Country, Namatjira painted the landscape he knew intimately not as scenery but as living, breathing, singing Country. In this painting, he has included mica flakes to create a shimmer. While his watercolours were embraced by settler Australia for their parallels with Western art traditions, they carry something far more grounded – precise recordings of place, knowledge and presence that remain vital today.

Yasmin Smith

Australian, born 1984

Bundle of Ntaria branches 4

2015

mid-fire slip with Hermannsburg wood ash glaze (river red gum, mulga, palm tree), black copper oxide wash, electrical wire

Art Gallery of New South Wales
Vicki Grima Ceramics Fund 2020

Yasmin Smith's ceramic practice is developed through research and community collaboration and responds directly to the environments in which she works. She created this work after living in Ntaria / Hermannsburg in Central Australia in 2014, as part of her larger installation *Ntaria fence*. Using moulds taken from the eucalyptus branches from the fence surrounding her home, she cast forms in clay from Western Aranda Country. The glaze, too, is made of Country, from the ash of local cooking fires. The work is not only a depiction of place but materially of that place, bringing together land, tree and culture.

Fred Williams

Australian, 1927–1982

Red cliff landscape

1981

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria

Presented through the NGV Foundation by Rio Tinto, Honorary Life Benefactor, 2001

From the mid 1950s, Fred Williams introduced a reductive, calligraphic rendering of the Australian landscape to his paintings, prints and drawings. Williams first visited the Pilbara region of northern Western Australia in 1979, at the invitation of the chair of mining company CRA Ltd (now Rio Tinto). Stimulated by this expansive landscape, Williams painted a series of gouaches and later a series of large oil paintings, distilling the geological forms, sparse vegetation and shifting colours, from vibrant to pearly, in his refined visual language. With a few lines, Williams here captures the white-trunked snappy gums (*Eucalyptus leucophloia*), perfectly adapted to this rocky terrain on the traditional lands of the Banjima, Yinhawangka and Yindjibarndi peoples.

Marylin Brown Petyarr

Alyawarr, c. 1965

Car, art and the landscape

1990

synthetic polymer paint on metal

National Gallery of Victoria

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria

by Violet Sheno and Dieter Blasse, Members, 1994

In many parts of Australia, cars are vital – connecting families to employment, shops, medical care and kin in distant towns and cities. The distances are vast, and on unforgiving roads the cars inevitably break down. Their carcasses, often called ‘bush cars’, are a common sight on the highways of inland Australia. Marilyn Brown Petyarr, an Alyawarr artist from Utopia, uses discarded car parts as canvases for her depictions of Country. Here, the everyday scene of travelling through the landscape, along with the trees and landmarks we pass, gives new life to what had become part of the very Country the artist captures.

John Brack

Australian, 1920–1999

The car

1955

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria
Purchased, 1956

John Brack is best known as a painter of life in urban and suburban Melbourne. *The car* is an extension of that, a visual commentary on the postwar rise of car ownership as new suburbs extended ever further into the country. Advertisements and media widely promoted their advantages, depicting happy nuclear families on picnics and holidays. Brack relocated a family he had seen driving on a suburban street, adding the sparsely timbered paddocks. He did this, he said, ‘to illustrate a social phenomenon important in our time: the family making an afternoon trip from the city to the nearby country on Sunday. It was part of the pattern of life of millions.’

Rosemary Laing

Australian, 1959–2024

Aristide

from the series *leak*

2010

chromogenic print

Museum of Australian Photography, City of Monash Collection, Victoria

Acquired with the funds raised by Friends of MGA Inc 2011

Named after a character in Patrick White's *The Twyborn Affair* (1979), a novel also set in the Cooma Monaro region of New South Wales, this image highlights suburban encroachment on Country. Rosemary Laing crafts a scene that seems upside-down whichever way you view it. Across much of her photographic practice, Laing has critically engaged with Australian landscape and the legacy of colonial intervention. Here, she visualises the incompatibility of the spread of suburban housing with Australia's natural environment.

Ian North

New Zealander/Australian, 1945–2024

Untitled no. 17

1981, printed c. 1984

from the *Canberra suite*, 1980–91

type C photograph

National Gallery of Victoria

Purchased through the NGV Foundation with the assistance
of David Syme & Co. Limited, Fellow, 2001

Ian North took over 2,000 photographs of Canberra in 1980–84, having moved there from Adelaide to head up the new department of photography at the National Gallery of Australia. He selected twenty-four to form the *Canberra suite*. His large-format colour photographs are deadpan depictions of the capital's streetscapes, devoid of human life. This is not the artfully designed urban vision of Walter Burley and Marion Mahoney Griffin, but a suburban landscape shaped by individual predilection and ad-hoc interventions.

Rob McHaffie

Australian, born 1978

**Single mums at the Reservoir
(after Hermann Corrodi)**

2024

oil on linen

Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria
Purchased, 2024

Sue Ford

Australian, 1943–2009

Some they landed right in the middle of the magic bush forest

‘Let’s go and find the witch’s letter’

from the series *The witches’ letter*

c. 1969

gelatin silver photographs

National Gallery of Australia
Purchased 1988

A prolific and significant feminist photographer and filmmaker, Sue Ford produced these photographs of children at play at a time of great experimentation in her practice. The theme of escaping the city echoes Ford’s move as a young mother from Melbourne to the bush settings of Cottlesbridge and Eltham. With a title image featuring a close-up of a eucalyptus tree trunk, the story begins with the girls expressing their dislike of ‘big city life’. It concludes with an image of the girls tucked up in a bed in the bush, framing the environment as a place of imagination and adventure.

Hossein Valamanesh

Iranian/Australian, 1949–2022

Nesting

2005

digital print on paper

Art Gallery of South Australia
Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation
South Australian Artists Fund 2022

Hossein Valamanesh emigrated from Iran in his mid twenties. During his long career, his practice evocatively expressed the sense of duality, or schism, that can come with carrying one's culture and way of being in one's heart. He often appears in his work in the form of a silhouette or shadow, as a kind of Everyman. In this photograph the artist is wholly present, physically and metaphorically embodying the challenge of trying to 'nest' in a new land, with its upside-down seasons, strange flora and fauna, and vastly different customs.

Khadim Ali

Pakistani/Australian, born 1978

Actor 3

2017–18

gouache, gold leaf and ink on paper

Art Gallery of South Australia

Gift of Susan Armitage through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2023. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

As a Hazara whose parents were born in Pakistan and whose grandparents came from Hazarastan (now Afghanistan), identity has always meant looking back toward a homeland. Our identity was never singular; it was a tapestry.

My ancestors never ate mangoes or oranges in Hazarastan. They never breathed the fragrance of jasmine or frangipani. Nor did they ever crush the leaves of a gum tree between their fingers and breathe in its sharp, earthy scent – a scent that has now become part of the home my children, and perhaps their children, will inherit. It is the scent of this Country and of the custodians who have cared for it across countless generations.

And whenever I breathe it in, I think of those refugees whose journeys ended in the ocean between Indonesia and Australia. Those refugees victim of close border policies.

— Khadim Ali

David Rose

Australian, 1936–2006

Eucalypt in rain

1977

colour screenprint

National Gallery of Australia

Gift of the artist 1992

Wukun Waṇambi

Marrakulu, 1962–2022

Three rocks

2015

hollow stringybark (*Eucalyptus tetradonta*), earth pigments

Private collection, Narm / Melbourne

We used larrakitj as a coffin but now instead of digging it in the ground we want to show it as art ... The stringybark tree, known as gaḍayka in language, has sacred names: Waṇambi, Binykurrṇu, Mawulul. It is the image or spirit of a person of my clan, the Marrakulu. There are sacred names for this spirit. We sing all of the cycle of that tree including when it falls. The honey, the blossom, the buds. It dances like us. The fish of the species Darpa, Warrwada and Warrwitjpal [painted on two of the larrakitj] are the ancestors of the land.

– Wukun Waṇambi, 2015

Of the gum

There are hundreds of eucalypt species, each evolved to a specific ecosystem – the variety is endless. Leaves range from elongated curves to the dramatically sculptural, from sombre olives and blue greys to the reds and bright greens of new growth. Flower buds in an array of shapes and sizes open to reveal frills of stamens in colours from soft pastels to blazing hues, attracting insects, birds and mammals to nectar. Hardened gumnuts (the fruit) open to release seeds. Bark can be shining smooth, mottled, flaky or deeply fissured, covered in insect scribbles or falling in ribbons.

The works in this room show artists looking closely, turning their attention to these details and the shape, texture, pattern and colour of eucalypts. Historically, this kind of close observation has been associated with scientific illustration and the decorative arts and crafts – categories often regarded as lesser forms of art than painting and sculpture, and frequently associated with women's work and domestic life. Many contemporary artists contest such hierarchies. For First Nations peoples, the distinction has never applied – the tree has always provided raw materials for works that are at once practical, ceremonial and artistic.

Gertie Yabbu

Worrorra, c. 1910 – c. 1981

Collier Bangmoro

Woonambal, c. 1919 – c. 1981

Garaggi (Bark bucket)

c. 1970

earth pigments on stringybark (*Eucalyptus* sp.), pandanus fibre

The University of Melbourne Art Collection

Gift of The Bardas Families in memory of Sandra Bardas OAM and David Bardas AO, 2024

Rex Battarbee

Australian, 1893–1973

Split trunk

1936

watercolour on paper

Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Dr Beverley and Mr Alan Castleman from the Dr Beverley Castleman Collection, 2024

Rex Battarbee first travelled to Central Australia in the 1930s, where a creative exchange with Western Aranda artist Albert Namatjira proved formative for both men. While Battarbee shared watercolour techniques, Namatjira shared his Country – its paths, its seasons, its songlines. What followed for Battarbee was a lifelong devotion to the landscape around Ntaria / Hermannsburg, a place he returned to many times to paint its ghost gums, gorges and ranges. In works like this study of a split trunk, Battarbee's attention is unhurried and intimate; he captures the texture and character of a single tree with the patience of someone who has watched this Country change across time.

Jessie Traill

Australian, 1881–1967

Good night in the gully where the white gums grow

1922

etching and aquatint printed in brown ink on paper

National Gallery of Australia
Purchased, 1977

This poetically titled print of slender saplings at dusk shows a sensitivity to the Australian bush that Jessie Traill demonstrated throughout her life. Traill was an accomplished printmaker. Here, the tonal aquatint captures the filtered light and shadows on the hillside, while the cropped composition shows the influence of Japanese printmaking.

The trees depicted grew near the leafy bush-block that Traill and her sister owned at Harkaway, south-east of Melbourne. For her it was a source of inspiration and contentment. Like her artist contemporaries Tom Roberts and Hans Heysen, Traill was an advocate for environmental protection and left her property to be kept as a nature reserve in perpetuity.

Helen Fuller

Australian, born 1949

Hollow log A

2023

stoneware, oxides, underglaze, porcelain slip

Hollow log B

2023

stoneware, oxides, underglaze, porcelain slip

Treepot

2023

terracotta, oxides, underglaze, porcelain slip

Courtesy of the artist

I dog walk daily through an Adelaide urban landscape past endless rows of planted council trees ... jacarandas, Queensland box, ornamental pear, white cedars, etc.

In the nearby dog parks, I am crunching underfoot scrolls of fallen bark from eucalyptus trees. The coiled split bark forms sometimes look like discarded limb casings. In their fallen random scatterings, they can also appear as abstract compositions of subtle colours, exciting rhythmical textures and shapes.

The realised beauty of the cast leaf litter, bark and seed pods inspire and inform my pottery making.

– Helen Fuller

Artist's name unknown

active in Australia, 1890s

(Framed embroidery)

c. 1896

silk wood, paint, glass, paper, metal

National Gallery of Victoria

Gift of Miss Mary Bostock in the memory of Mrs Tristram Buesst, 1976

Grace Cossington Smith

Australian, 1892–1984

Gum blossoms

c. 1942

oil on paperboard

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Purchased 1943

Margaret Stones

Australian, 1920–2018, lived in England
1951–2002

Eucalyptus preissiana

1963

Eucalyptus forrestiana

1964

watercolours over pencil on paper

National Gallery of Victoria
Felton Bequest, 1964

Margaret Stones began her artistic and botanical career in Melbourne, attending botany lectures at Melbourne University and participating in field trips. In 1951 Stones moved to London where her meticulous drawing skills led to her becoming a principal botanical artist for Kew Gardens and for *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*, which has been in print since 1787. Although the two eucalypts carefully depicted here are now distributed widely, each derives from a small area in south-western Western Australia, a region renowned for its rich biodiversity.

Rosa Fiveash (artist)

Australian, 1854–1938

Harcourt Barrett (artist and lithographer)

English/Australian, 1838–1904

Eucalyptus leucoxylon* var. *macrocarpa
(red-flowering)

Eucalyptus pyriformis

from J. E. Brown's *The Forest Flora of South Australia*, E.
Spiller, Government Printer, Adelaide, 1882–90

chromolithographs on paper

Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria

Purchased with funds from the Ferry Foundation, 2011

Deanne Gilson

Wadawurrung, born 1967

Post Preston, after the bushfires, our Country, plants and animals need healing

2021

white ceremonial ochre, wattle tree sap, synthetic polymer paint on linen

Darebin Art Collection, Victoria

Deanne Gilson's paintings bring together kitsch objects, native flora and deeply personal cultural narratives. A self-described Margaret Preston fan, Gilson admires Preston's aesthetic while challenging her appropriation of Aboriginal motifs. In this work, flowering gum blossoms take centre stage, intertwining with chocolate lilies, wattle and paper daisies alongside kookaburras, a falling rosella and a porcelain koala. The koala prompted Gilson's haunting thought that one day, kitsch ornaments may be all we have left of these animals.

Margaret Preston

Australian, 1875–1963

Gum blossom

1928

hand-coloured woodcut on Japanese paper

The University of Melbourne Art Collection

Purchased through the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Fund, 2024

Margaret Preston played a noticeable role in changing perceptions towards Australian flowers through her modernist oil paintings, brightly hand-coloured woodcuts and magazine articles. Preston's art was seen in popular exhibitions that received glowing reviews, and also circulated through reproductions, especially in *The Home*, a stylish lifestyle magazine, and in the quarterly journal *Art in Australia*. The year before this striking print was made, a special issue of *Art in Australia* focused on Preston's art, proclaiming that 'her gay and vivid woodcuts of native flowers, original and beautiful in design, are an ideal wall decoration for the simply furnished house'.

Robert Prenzel

German/Australian, 1866–1941

Cockatoo

1915

Australian blackwood, other timbers

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
The Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequest, 1973

Prussian-born woodcarver Robert Prenzel emigrated to Melbourne in 1888 and established his own cabinet-making business in the early 1900s. Encouraged to carve items that would appeal to a local audience, he merged the fluid curves of Art Nouveau design with Australian motifs – birds, animals and native plants, in a style later dubbed ‘gumnut nouveau’. This panel was produced during the First World War, when anti-German sentiment limited his formerly lucrative furniture commissions. Although it is not carved from eucalypt timbers, gum branches were the principal native plant that he depicted, using various shapes of leaves and gumnuts for decorative effect.

Michelle Pulatuwayu Woody Minnapinni

Tiwi, born 1972

Ngiya Murrakupupuni (My Country)

2022

earth pigments on stringybark

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
Purchased, 2022

Used by communities across northern Australia and the Tiwi Islands, bark from the stringybark tree is collected only during the wet season, when it is moist and flexible. Once cut, it is stripped smooth, cured over fire, bent into shape and sewn with bush string from the native hibiscus to create tunga, an everyday object used to carry food. The tunga also holds deep ceremonial significance – when a Tiwi person dies, it is placed upturned on the pukumani pole, signifying the end of life. Using natural pigments she collects, grinds and mixes by hand, Michelle Pulatuwayu Woody Minnapinni paints her jilamara (designs) expressing Tiwi creation stories and Country.

Pedro Wonaeamirri

Tiwi, born 1974

Tunga (basket)

2010

earth pigments on stringybark

The University of Melbourne Art Collection

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Anthony Scott, 2015

Dino Wilson

Tiwi, 1983–2023

Warnarringa (Sun)

2022

earth pigments on stringybark

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
Purchased, 2022

Shirley Purdie

Gija, born 1947

Thalngarri / snappy gum / *Eucalyptus brevifolia*

2016

natural ochre and pigments on canvas

Medical History Museum, The University of Melbourne

Berrembi ngarag noonamangge nawarra-ngarri ngenayin, deg-garri noonamanggende. Ngagenybe nyamananim, woomberramande-ngarri. Mayim, mayim-boorroo jang-girrem-yarri, dam minyjaarrany-ngarrem, ngarem-boorroo. Yagengarram ngarag noonamangge dam, ngarnbe-boorroo goordooroom-boorroo, woobooj-woobooj-girrem, larndoorroo-boorroo, dambi goowoolem. Yagengarram dam minybernem ngarnji-noongoo, gaalji ngarag-garri ngoorramangbende manyjangam-boorroo ngararag-garri woomberramande.

I made these paintings about the things I saw when I was growing up. They show the things my old women told me. They are about bush food, the things we can eat in the bush, fruits like black plum and that kind of thing and bush honey. Others that I painted show those trees used to make artefacts like fighting sticks, digging sticks and coolamons. Other paintings show the grasses that people used to use to make the spinifex resin that they used to join axe heads to the handles.

— Shirley Purdie

Shirley Purdie

Gija, born 1947

Warlarri / white river gum / *Eucalyptus papuana*

2016

natural ochre and pigments on canvas

Medical History Museum, The University of Melbourne

Shirley Purdie's botanical studies document the plants of the East Kimberley region used by Gija people for food, medicine and art making. Conceived as a botanical encyclopedia, the work preserves cultural knowledge passed down through generations of Gija people. It is the result of years of research by Purdie, who collaborated with linguist Frances Kofod to record individual plant species alongside their Gija, Latin and English names. Together, the series exemplifies cultural continuity and exchange.

Jenna Lee

Gulumerridjin (Larrakia) / Wardaman / KarraJarri, born 1992

Invasive native

2020

single-channel digital video, black and white, silent, 04:00 min

Courtesy of the artist and MARS Gallery, Melbourne

This far from home, and still our roots run deep.

Tucked away in a corner of Kew Gardens, the largest botanical collection in the world, stands a cluster of four native Australian gum trees. With branches reaching high into the sky, roots running deep, they are firmly secured to the earth.

Standing there I found comfort; we are all so far from home, in an environment so hostilely different from our own.

Yet they stand tall, not just surviving but thriving as an invasive native, collected to act as a living archive, now providing a connection to home.

– Jenna Lee

Robyn Mayo

Australian, born 1953

Desert bloodwood (*Corymbia terminalis*)

from *Six days at Ruby Gap (April expedition)*

2000

watercolour and pen and ink

Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria

Donated through the Australian Government's

Cultural Gifts Program by Robyn Mayo, 2017

Framed with funds donated by McCain Foods (Aust), 2018

This bloodwood stood on a lower bank of the intermittent Hale River running through Ruby Gap, 142 kilometres east of Alice Springs. When first seen by Europeans, the garnets sparkling in the river's sand were mistaken for rubies.

The very graceful branches were in full bloom above my tent, the ground was covered with spent seed pods, the air heavy with the scent of eucalyptus.

Many galls clung to the branches, created by native insects such as wasps and Fergusonina flies.

The red kino extruding from the tree's textured bark has many Aboriginal medicinal uses.

— Robyn Mayo

William Strutt

English, 1825–1915, lived in Australia 1850–62

Peppermint or gum tree leaf, Melbourne, Australia

c. 1861

oil on canvas

The University of Melbourne Art Collection

Purchased through the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Fund, 1994

This elegant study of gum leaves was painted by William Strutt shortly before he left Australia to return to England. Strutt had lived in Melbourne from 1850, working successfully as an artist and illustrator. He kept all his studies and sketches and often drew upon them in later years. In 1861 Strutt witnessed the departure of the ill-fated Victorian Exploring Expedition (better known as the Burke and Wills expedition). Fifty years later, in 1911, he painted his grand narrative painting *The burial of Burke* (now held in State Library Victoria). This study likely influenced the thin dangling branch in the painting, which directs the viewer's eyes downward to the interment of Burke's concealed remains.

Louisa Anne Meredith

English/Australian, 1812–1895

Study for Gum-flowers and Love

c. 1860

watercolour on paper

National Gallery of Victoria

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria

by Mrs James Evans, Governor, 1989

This watercolour is a study for the gums in a chromolithograph titled *Gum flowers and Love* in Louisa Anne Meredith's book *Some of my Bush Friends in Tasmania* (1860). ('Love' is a native blue-flowering creeper.) Through her drawings, prose, poetry and published books, Meredith commented on colonial society and encouraged a greater appreciation of the Australian environment. At the time this was painted, she and her husband successfully campaigned for Tasmanian legislation to protect wildlife endangered by colonial actions. The subject carefully depicted here, down to the insect damage, is the Tasmanian blue gum (*Eucalyptus globulus*), which would later become the floral emblem of that state.

Eirene Mort (designer)

Australian 1879–1977, lived in England
1899–1906

Cleone Cracknell (metal worker)

Australian, 1868–1945

Mirror

c. 1906

copper repoussé mounted over wood frame

National Gallery of Australia
Purchased, 1984

Ethel Atkinson

Australian, 1887–1991

Salad bowl with gumnut and leaf design

1912

handpainted porcelain

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Purchased 1912

Vase with gumnut and leaf design

early 20th century

handpainted porcelain

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Purchased (1918)

Dorrit Black

Australian, 1891–1951

The pot plant

1933

colour linocut on paper

Art Gallery of South Australia

Bequest of Lisette Kohlhausen, 1969

Jess Dare

Australian, born 1982

Collecting Time

2026

powder-coated brass

Courtesy of the artist

Through making, I process the world around me and soothe my fear of forgetting.

Since my son, Banjo was old enough to crawl he has been picking things up in the garden and handing them to me. With curious wonder I started to keep the gumnuts, twigs and seedpods he collected and eventually *Collecting Time* began to grow. I remake the things he collects in brass – simplified, essential, symbolic, making permanent the impermanent, an exchange between mother and son, a record of time. A treasure to keep and hold, long after the moment has gone and the memory has faded.

— Jess Dare

Jess Dare

Australian, born 1982

No More Time

2026

powder-coated brass

Courtesy of the artist

A neckpiece about grief, loss, memory and commemoration. I collected the remnant flowers and leaves left over from my grandmother's coffin spray and remade the segments of baby blue gum in brass, holding that final act of love and care still. Its rigid form referencing metal wreaths found on graves, the piece itself a kind of final farewell ...

What began with *Collecting Time* culminates in *No More Time* – the two groups together form a cycle, a plant lifecycle, growth and decay a metaphor for our own lifecycle.

— Jess Dare

Peter Tully

Australian, 1947–1992

Gumnut necklace

c. 1981

plastic, gumnuts, metal

Powerhouse collection

Gift of David McDiarmid, 1995

Artist and activist Peter Tully was the inaugural director of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and a designer of flamboyant jewellery and costumes. Tully often incorporated stereotypical symbols of Australia ('Australiana') into his art, as did fashion designers Jenny Kee, Linda Jackson and others in their creative community. His playful gumnut necklace represents more than mere decoration. In a period in Sydney when 'gay bashing' was becoming a public scandal, it was a political statement to occupy the streets in full pop-culture regalia, countering prejudice with joyful exuberance.

Maree Clarke

Yorta Yorta/Wamba Wamba/Mutti Mutti/Boonwurrung, born
1961

Gumnut necklace

c. 1988

gumnuts and thread

Koorie Heritage Trust, Narrm / Melbourne

Kiah Krafts, Mildura

Australia, 1987–1990

Maree Clarke

Yorta Yorta/Wamba Wamba/Mutti Mutti/Boonwurrung, born 1961

Gum necklace

c. 1988

gum bud caps and gumnuts, thread

Gumnut necklace

c. 1993

gumnuts, thread

Koorie Heritage Trust, Narrm / Melbourne

Maree Clarke has been making jewellery since the late 1980s, when, along with her late brother Peter Clarke and sister Karen Clarke-Edwards, she established the Aboriginal arts enterprise Kiah Krafts in Mildura – a small business that enabled the siblings to explore their cultural heritage through making. These handmade necklaces draw on materials gathered from Country, together showcasing the remarkable diversity of gumnuts found across eucalyptus species.

Carol Panangka Rontji

Western Aranda, 1968–2009

Purti Endoola (Magpies) jar

1995

terracotta, underglaze colours

Powerhouse collection

Purchased 1996

The Country around Ntaria / Hermannsburg and Mparntwe / Alice Springs is abundant in wildlife: birds, reptiles, insects and mammals make their homes in and around the eucalypts. For more than thirty years, the Hermannsburg potters have captured this diversity on their distinctive ceramic vessels with vibrancy, creativity and warmth. Their pots are colourful and often playful, depicting Country in all its forms – the vast sweep of the landscape as well as the creatures, great and small, who live there. Painted with an intimate knowledge of place, each pot is a sensitive portrait of everyday life among the trees and grasses.

Anita Mbitjana Ratara

Western Aranda, born 1943

Tuakitja (Grey-crowned babbler)

2022

terracotta and underglazes

Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria

Purchased 2023

Stefan Szonyi

Hungarian/Australian, born 1945

Music box

1981

earthenware

National Gallery of Victoria

Presented by the Crafts Board of the Australia Council, 1986

Russell Grimwade

Australian, 1879–1955

Eucalypt studies

1919–30

carbon prints

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
The Russell and Mab Grimwade Bequests, 1973

During the 1910s and 1920s Russell Grimwade wrote and illustrated a book on eucalypts. A skilled photographer, he captured in fine detail and with careful lighting varieties grown locally, in the Melbourne Botanic Gardens and sourced through his network of gum enthusiasts. He also planted numerous species in his extensive Toorak garden and at his farm to Melbourne's south-east, waiting until the trees matured to photograph their flowers. Published in 1920 and expanded in 1930, *An Anthography of the Eucalypts* was important in its time for its accessible language and the quality of its illustrations.

Top row, left to right:

Eucalyptus globulus (Tasmanian blue gum)

Corymbia calophylla (marri)

Eucalyptus lehmannii (bushy yate)

Eucalyptus behriana (bull mallee)

Eucalyptus leucoxylon subspecies *megalocarpa* (large-fruited yellow gum)

Eucalyptus pleurocarpa (tallerack)

Continued overleaf

Bottom row, left to right:

Eucalyptus apiculata (narrow-leaved mallee ash)

Eucalyptus macrocarpa (mottlecah)

Eucalyptus robusta (swamp mahogany)

Eucalyptus cosmophylla (cup gum)

Eucalyptus torquata (coral gum)

Eucalyptus megacarpa (bullich)

Jane E. Brown

British/Australian, born 1967

Violet Street

Corymbia ficifolia

Silver princess (*Eucalyptus caesia*)

Photosynthetic

from the series *1,8-Cineole*

2026

composites of 4 silver gelatin photographs (printed with eucalyptus oil)

Courtesy of Jane E. Brown

Miegunyah Creative Fellowship commission, 2026

Jane E. Brown's research into the photography of Russell Grimwade, in particular his glass-plate negatives and carbon prints made for *An Anthography of the Eucalypts* (1920/30), has resulted in a series of compelling photographs of gum blossom and gumnuts. Brown's deep knowledge of the history, chemistry and alchemy of photography led to experimentation with developing techniques. Remarkably, she has found a way to print her photographs using eucalyptus oil as the developing agent. This inspired her series title *1,8-Cineole*, which is the chemical name for eucalyptol, the primary compound found in eucalyptus oil.

Room 5

Please be aware that this gallery contains depictions of nudity.

Sick Country

For more than 65,000 years, First Nations peoples have tended Country, using fire as a tool of management and care. Low-temperature burns, timed to the seasons and moisture levels, cleared undergrowth without destroying ecosystems. Eucalypts are among the most flammable trees on earth. While many species have evolved to withstand fire and some require burning to propagate, others are fire sensitive and fail to regenerate. Maintaining a delicate balance was, and remains, essential.

Yet, throughout Australia, deforestation continues for agricultural, industrial and urban development. Dense regrowth and massive fuel loads feed bushfires of increasing intensity and frequency, while water extraction and worsening droughts and floods push eucalypt ecosystems toward collapse. Many species grow naturally only in finite regions, and one quarter of all gum tree species are threatened with extinction.

The works of art in this room speak to this crisis. Some allude to its causes, while others capture the aftermath of disaster: fire-scarred forests and drowned trees, giants felled by forces beyond their endurance. Beyond the physical, some works convey a deeper unease, picturing the landscape as a place of psychological tension – hostile, unfamiliar, and the body within it exposed and vulnerable.

Jill Orr (artist)

Australian, born 1952, lived in the Netherlands 1980–86

Elizabeth Campbell (photographer)

Australian, born 1959

Hanging over root

Stretched in between

Inner tree

Crucifix

from the series *Bleeding trees*

1979, printed 2012

chromogenic photographs

Courtesy of the artist

In Jill Orr's 1979 series *Bleeding trees* the artist's body becomes a conduit for the viewer's emotional response. Strung up as if crucified, stretched across branches, or disappearing within them, her body turns our empathy towards the trees. A pioneering work of environmental art in Australia, the series is also an early example of postmodernist performance art, with Orr making a social commentary using her own body as the primary medium. For Orr, the initial live action and the final image are equally important parts of the work, creating 'openings' through which an audience or viewer can connect to a landscape in crisis.

Russell Drysdale

English/Australian, 1912–1981

Walls of China

1945

oil on hardboard

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Purchased 1945

In 1944, a series of dry seasons culminated in a historic drought in western New South Wales. Russell Drysdale and reporter Keith Newman were commissioned to document its effects. In Drysdale's images scorched animal bones merge with scarred tree trunks, landscapes crumble, and red dust abrades everything.

This painting is named after the monumental sand dunes at Lake Mungo where they camped. Tree forms contort before an alien sky in a nightmarish and surreal scene that alludes to existential crises felt in a post-atomic world as well as settler-colonial anxiety about the harsh loneliness of inland Australia.

Arthur Boyd

Australian, 1920–1999

Figures by a creek

1944

oil on canvas on board

Art Gallery of South Australia
Gift of an anonymous donor 1993

Figures by a creek is one of a series of unsettling paintings and drawings that Arthur Boyd produced during the Second World War, in which he sought to convey the angst and confusion many felt at the time. Influenced by artists such as Hieronymus Bosch, William Blake and Louis Buvelot, Boyd created a scene of chaos in which writhing and embracing figures are immersed within an endless dense forest. Here the Australian bush is presented as an antipodean circle of hell, impersonal and inescapable.

Mervyn Rubuntja

Western Aranda, born 1958

No more give away

2024

watercolour pigment on found road sign

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
Purchased, 2024

In this painting Mervyn Rubuntja transforms a 'give way' road sign into a direct and uncompromising political statement which speaks to the history of dispossession faced by Aboriginal Australians. Both protest and declaration, Rubuntja's words assert a firm resistance to exploitation and loss of land, culture, and authority – especially at the hands of mining conglomerates which operate on unceded Indigenous land across the country. The ghost gum stands alone, a witness to what has been taken and to what must be protected for future generations.

Arthur Streeton

Australian, 1867–1943, lived in England
1887–1919

Last of the messmates

1928

oil on canvas

Private collection, courtesy of Smith and Singer, Melbourne

After living abroad for over twenty years, Arthur Streeton returned to Australia, acquiring land in the Dandenong Ranges. The rolling hills and expansive vistas inspired his atmospheric late-career landscapes – and his increasingly vocal activism. In a newspaper article titled ‘Ruin in the Range. The penalty of Occupation’, Streeton decried the logging of old-growth forests: ‘With our settlement we have upset the natural order of things, and the result is fire, wind and desolation ... [We] have no appreciation of the beauty and use of trees, no sense of our responsibility ... in preserving the forests for future generations.’ Streeton’s message often fell on deaf ears, with one reviewer describing this painting as ‘a capital rural scene’.

Robert Campbell Junior

Ngaku/Dhunghutti, 1944–1993

Dorrigo Falls

1989

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria

Purchased, NGV Supporters and Patrons of Indigenous Art, 2007

In this work, Robert Campbell Junior reveals the environmental destruction wrought on Gumbaynggirr Country, specifically Newell Falls, Dorriggo Mountain, New South Wales. Campbell omits the horizon and focuses on the road itself – carved into the steep escarpment in the late nineteenth century to service the logging of native forests for hoop pine and red cedar, later for tallowwood (*Eucalyptus microcorys*) and other hardwoods. A truck laden with timber passes through an escarpment studded with tall eucalypts and palms that highlight what is being taken. Campbell's perspectival distortions add drama to the hairpin turns, while the overall composition evokes Country in disquieting flux.

Jessie Traill

Australian, 1881–1967

Beautiful victims

1914

etching on Oriental paper on cardboard

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art
Purchased 1961

Sydney Long

Australian, 1871–1955, lived in England 1910–21, 1922–25,
1952–55

Spirit of the bushfire

1900

watercolour and pencil on paper

Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria
Purchased 1977

In this watercolour Sydney Long symbolises the destructive power of an Australian bushfire as a young woman with flame-coloured hair who casts a fire that flickers and swirls like undulating fabric. Femmes fatales – seductive but dangerous women – were a common theme in the late nineteenth century, reflecting male unease as women slowly gained independence. Long was not the only artist in Australia to personify elemental forces as women – Charles Conder and Arthur Streeton also evoked drought and scorching winds, other powerful climatic threats to this country

John Gollings

Australian, born 1944

877.00M E 145° 12' 31.12' S 037° 25' 15.95'

from the series *Black Saturday*

2009, reprinted 2012

digital print on paper

McClelland Art Collection, Victoria

The Black Saturday bushfires burnt across Victoria on 7 February 2009 and for weeks after. Ignited by as many as 400 separate outbreaks, these fires resulted in a disastrous loss of life, with 173 people killed and 414 injured, along with innumerable animals, reptiles, birds and other creatures. Julia Gillard, then Deputy Prime Minister, described the event as 'a tragedy beyond belief, beyond precedent and beyond words'. Following this devastation, John Gollings took a series of aerial photographs of the Kinglake and Marysville region, showing the catastrophic impact to the land, with scorched tree trunks patterning the denuded hills. With a maximum of 46.4°C, 7 February 2009 remains the hottest day on record in Melbourne.

John Kauffmann

Australian, 1864–1942

Bush fire

c. 1910s

bromide print

National Gallery of Australia

Purchased 1980

Mary Tonkin

Australian, born 1973

A scream, Kalorama

2023

oil on linen

Courtesy of the artist and Australian Galleries, Melbourne

In June 2021 the Dandenong Ranges were hit by extreme winds, from an unusual south-westerly direction. Painted at the foot of one of many old trees uprooted in that storm, *A scream, Kalorama* is an existential cry, a scream of anguish at what climate damage we have already wrought, what terror is to come. Two years on, this beautiful mass is already being subsumed by fungi and seedlings. The hollow beneath, filled with water, pulses with larvae and a croaking frog. I want future generations to experience that same will to life, unimpeded by our anthropocentric idiocy and apathy.

– Mary Tonkin

Nici Cumpston

Barkindji, born 1963

Ringbarked II, Nookamka Lake

2011/2016

pigment inkjet print on paper, hand coloured with watercolours and crayons

Courtesy of the artist and Michael Reid Gallery, Sydney

Years of walking slowly along the shores of Nookamka / Lake Bonney, Barmera, gives me the ultimate gift of learning from Country. With camera in hand, I bear witness to the evidence of ongoing Aboriginal occupation.

Since time immemorial, many different language groups, including Barkandji people, have travelled great distances to come here, to hold ceremonies, to share food, and to exchange goods and knowledge with each other. This freshwater lake is a place of great abundance. It is alive, you can hear and feel the powerful energy of our ancestors.

This work reveals the rising salinity in the salt encrusted ground. It also exposes the practice of ringbarking used to strangle and kill trees. Little to no foresight has been given to sustaining this vital ecological environment and now very few living trees remain.

— Nici Cumpston

Nikki Browne

Bidjara, born 1977

STOP KILLING COUNTRY

2022

sewing-machine cogs, gum leaves, resin, copper, silver

Collection of the artist

The work is inspired by my childhood love of giant blue gum leaves ... Just because something is unfamiliar or unseen doesn't mean it shouldn't be protected. The copper plate symbolises the redirection of waterways that nourish the soil; without this water, the gum trees that depend on it are dying. The cogs represent industry – the relentless churning of machines and the clearing of land for housing and modern development, which destroys habitats for wildlife and accelerates the extinction of plants, animals, birds and fish. Yet, we can live in harmony with nature. We can still enjoy homes and cars, but we must do so in a more sustainable way that stops the destruction of Country.

— Nikki Browne

Regeneration

Eucalypts are among the most adaptable plants on earth. Their ability to survive extremes is intrinsic to their makeup: leathery leaves hang vertically to limit sun exposure, insulating bark resists fire, and woody gumnuts protect seeds. Roots tap deep or wide for water and form symbiotic partnerships with fungi. Stress from fire, storm, drought, flood or grazing can trigger epicormic buds, which sprout rapid new growth. Many species form lignotubers, mallee roots, at their base that store energy and can regenerate even when trunks above ground have been destroyed.

This room follows crisis with hope. The artists look to what comes after: shoots emerging from scorched wood, life returning to flooded forests, seeds finding soil. Their works speak to the ongoing custodianship of Country by First Nations peoples, to the value of looking closely and carefully at trees, and to the power of collective advocacy in defending what remains. While gum trees continue to be damaged by logging, land clearing and a warming climate, the works here ask us to pause, to breathe, and to consider our role in ensuring their survival.

Peter Dombrovskis

German/Australian, 1945–1996

Morning mist, Rock Island Bend, Franklin River, Tasmania

c. 1980

pigment inkjet print

Museum of Australian Photography, City of Monash Collection, Victoria
Acquired 2015

This mesmeric photograph by nature photographer Peter Dombrovskis became the iconic image of the 'No Dams' campaign to save the pristine Franklin River, in Tasmania's remote south-west, from being flooded for hydroelectricity. The grandeur and beauty he captured encouraged many Australians to feel passionately about a part of the country most were unlikely to visit, and the image was seen everywhere, from posters and flyers to calendars and campaign advertisements. Widespread protests contributed to the Labor Party's 1983 federal election victory, and the High Court subsequently ruled to protect the river. Rock Island Bend is now safe within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, one of numerous successful examples of the power of collective advocacy.

Lin Onus

Yorta Yorta, 1948–1996

Floodwater ‘Woorong Nucko’

1995

synthetic polymer paint on linen

Private Collection

Floodwater ‘Woorong Nucko’ speaks to the sense of love and belonging that my father Lin had for his grandmother’s Country and represents so much of his journey as both an artist and Yorta Yorta man. At first glance, one is taken in by the commanding river red gums and the surreal, magical mirror-world that is created when the forest is in flood; it is only later that one becomes aware of the fish making their way through the landscape, leaving only the occasional ripple. While changing climates and the diversion of water for agriculture have made what was once an annual flooding a rarity, this is how I will always see the trees of Barmah Forest when I close my eyes.

– Tiriki Onus

Dean Cross

Worimi, born 1986

SCORE/SCAR

2022–26

oil stick on eight sheets of paper, Camden white gum
(*Eucalyptus benthamii*)

Courtesy of Dean Cross and STATION

Here, the eucalypt stick is from a Camden white gum (*Eucalyptus benthamii*), a critically endangered species endemic to New South Wales, grown on Cross's family farm from a tree he planted with his father nearly thirty years ago.

In its abstraction, *SCORE/SCAR* resists easy reading. For Cross, this mirrors the unknowability of a tree. We may look at an old gum and believe we understand it – its species, its height, its age. But a tree has lived a life we cannot access and witnessed histories we will never know. From roots to leaves circulates an energy invisible to us. Together, drawing and stick speak to the essence of Country – where person and tree exist in balance, connected by the same living energy.

Dean Cross

Worimi, born 1986

There are 1000 ways to change the world, but you only need one

2026

paper, ink, flour, manna gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) seeds

Courtesy of Dean Cross and STATION
Miegunyah Creative Fellowship commission, 2026

I am often struck by the incomprehensibility of the scale of the universe. It feels deliberate, necessary. Like a protective cloak shielding my small human mind from imploding. I wonder if a eucalypt seed feels the same way.

On a small parcel of Walbunja Country two placentas, grown simultaneously inside a single womb, were placed underground at the base of a pre-invasion manna gum during Ceremony. Now, in that same spot, a new twin-branched manna gum has sprouted. With the right care, it will outlive us all.

This sculpture was made collaboratively with many hands and minds. Marrangbu (thank you) to everyone who contributed.

– Dean Cross

Continued overleaf

Each ball holds the seed of a manna gum, encased in paper pulp designed to break down and help the seed germinate. At the close of this exhibition, they will be returned to Country.

Seed balls made by: Muqatl Unais Ameen, Anonymous, Carolyn Atkins, Joshwa Bendijo, Chris Bennett, Mads Burgess, Cody Buchanan, Alisa Bunbury, Isabel Frías Corona, Simon Cox, Dean Cross, Billy Cunningham, Tom Cusack, Patrick Dagg, Winter Fagioli, Yinan Feng, Olivia Fuller, Tessa Galea-Grant, Sophie Gerhard, Sunday Gerhard-Cusack, Pip Griffin, Beck Hall, Siage Hawkins, Marysia Hines, Maya Hodge, Angela Hovenden, Jonathan Hovenden, Leah Jackson, Turt Langridge, Kyla McFarlane, Leon Mann, Svetlana Matovski, Pippa Milne, Claire Moreton, Lachlan Muscat-Sacco, Kerstin Norburn, Sam Pulford, Lester Rajapakse, Carly Richardson, James Shannon, John Steil, Tara Storey, Dylan Strahan, Grace Terry, Kerrie Theobald, Mes Vermeer, Aunty Kim Wandin, Denise Wite, Jasmin Yujing Wu

John Wolseley

English/Australian, born 1938

Scrambling, climbing, flying and moving through the Cobboboonee Forest

2006/2009

watercolour, carbonised wood, graphite on sixteen sheets of paper

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Gift of the artist 2015. Donated through the

Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program

[In this work] I try to describe the experience of moving through a mature forest ... I am in the Cobboboonee Forest towards the South Australian border – dragging my feet through the leaf-litter, hands grasping the trunks and branches of the trees, eyes up in the tracery of the branches with the songs of the birds in the air around me. Carbon is present here in all its many forms, exhaled and released in the breath and song of the birds and an airborne sugar glider, and in the charcoal of burnt branches. And at the same time, inhaled and contained in the miraculous processes of photosynthesis.

– John Wolseley

Matthew Harris

mixed European/Koorie descent, born 1991

With A Warm Embrace

2022-2023

recycled industrial felt, Wangaratta Woollen Mills acrylic yarn, gesso, acrylic paint, river stones and polyester filling

Wangaratta Art Gallery Collection, Victoria

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by the artist

This work is based on a pair of stuffed koalas Matthew Harris' grandmother made from the coat she was wearing when she met his grandfather, sewn with wool from the Wangaratta Woollen Mills in a shade called 'Koala'. Too precious to play with, they have sat together in a cabinet ever since – familial heirlooms to be cared for from one generation to the next. Koalas are among the most specialised mammals on earth, relying exclusively on eucalyptus for food, water and shelter. For humans, to protect the gum tree is to protect koalas. In this work, the pair are inseparable, bound together just as the eucalypt and koala are in life.

Rebecca Selleck

Australian, born 1986

James Tylor

Kaurna/Māori, born 1986

Bookcase

Two seater lounge with coffee table

from the series *Fire Country*

2022

burnt Australian ash timber, cast bronze

Courtesy of James Tylor and N.Smith Gallery, Sydney

Fire Country, these works harness the productive, and often essential, role fire plays within Australia's ecology. Crafted from eucalypt timber burnt to carbon black and inlaid with polished bronze casts of new leaf shoots and post-fire fungi, the pieces sit between destruction and renewal. Rather than framing fire as a threat, the work embraces it as part of our collective relationship with this continent – offering at once sorrow for what has been lost, and hope for what can grow back.

Wanapati Yunupinu

Gumatj, born 1989

Näṇarr – Tongue of Flame

2025

etched stringybark

The University of Melbourne Art Collection

Purchased with funds donated by Judith and Leon Gorr, 2026

Wanapati Yunupinu pioneered the practice of etching into stringybark with a rotary drill, rather than metal. This, his first etched stringybark, represents the flames that broke out of a men's ceremonial ground at Biranybirany in the Waṇarr (time before morning), having been spread from Madarrpa Country by Bäru, the ancestral crocodile. A compelling feature is the darkened gnarl, which signifies the body of Bäru, who metamorphosed into fire. The work's title suggests language, and indeed the Gumatj sing of their language Dhuwalandja as the tongue of fire that incinerates all dishonesty, leaving only the bones of truth.

Hector Tjupuru Burton

Pitjantjatjara, c. 1939–2017

Puṇu-ngura (Tree country)

2013

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
Purchased, 2013

The many-branched tree forms in Hector Burton's *Puṇu-ngura* rise like canopies in rainbow colours, from three strong roots. It is an image of abundance, in which the puṇu (trees) are shown in planar perspective, growing in different directions from the artist's ngura (Country). This work issues from a 2011 initiative of Burton and several senior Anangu artists to paint trees instead of Tjukurpa (Dreaming stories), and to protect the importance of their law. Significantly, as Burton has stated, 'The trees are different for Anangu. They are the ancestors, they are our family. They are our history and our future.'

Selma Nunay Coulthard

Luritja, born 1954

Pmara Nurnaka (Our Home)

2024

watercolour on found road sign

The University of Melbourne Art Collection
Purchased, 2024

Selma Nunay Coulthard's repurposed road sign depicts a place where children grow up on Country, guided by Elders and their knowledge. In reworking the sign, Coulthard disrupts its original function as an instrument of control and replaces it with a message grounded in Indigenous authority and lived experience. The painted surface becomes a declaration of cultural continuity and the importance of language. *Pmara Nurnaka* presents Country not just as location or place, but as home – a living, enduring source of belonging, memory and responsibility.

The crisp, invigorating fragrance of eucalyptus oil is a distinctive smell, familiar to many of us. In fact, each eucalyptus species has its own unique oil composition and scent. The scents throughout this exhibition have been designed by Erin Adams of Smell Art.

Essential eucalypt oils:

- Lemon-scented gum
(*Corymbia citriodora*)
- Narrow-leaved peppermint
(*Eucalyptus radiata*)

Additional ingredients:

- Australian rosewood
(*Dysoxylum fraserianum*)
- Trace compounds: Eucalyptus by-absolute, cade oil, geosmin