

Media Release

24 November, 2025

Potter Museum of Art announces ambitious new exhibition

A velvet ant, a flower and a bird



The University of Melbourne’s Potter Museum of Art is proud to announce an ambitious new exhibition curated by internationally renowned curator **Chus Martínez** titled *A velvet ant, a flower and a bird*.

Opening **19 February** and running until **6 June 2026**, the exhibition brings together works from the University of Melbourne’s Classics, Biology, and Art collections, alongside new commissions and performances by acclaimed artists from Australia and abroad.

Reflecting on the exhibition, Martínez says: “This exhibition can be seen as a garden of knowledge, structured around three familiar figures from nature — a velvet ant, a flower, and a bird. These figures represent a parliament of beings, each carrying symbolic and metaphorical weight that encourage us to reimagine what intelligence means.”

Historic and contemporary works will be displayed in dialogue, fostering unexpected encounters between the University’s collections and contemporary practice. The exhibition invites visitors to question the divide between natural and artificial intelligence, and to see intelligence as something shared across all living systems and materials, rather than an exclusively human trait.

This expansive curatorial vision explores how museum collections can open space for new ways of reasoning. “In approaching the University’s collections outside conventional academic frameworks, I came to the idea of calling animal wisdom into account,” **Martínez explains**.

“Collections hold many narratives – historical, cultural, economic, material – and by bringing them into living knowledge systems, we’re able to dissolve the binary between the natural and the artificial. The visitor enters a kind of ecosystem, where objects and digital media exist without hierarchy, allowing the imagination to roam widely.”

The first of these entities is **the velvet ant**, which **Martínez describes** as “a wise being, a connoisseur of materials and renewable energies,” who represents radical adaptation — inspired by recent scientific studies into its uniquely light-absorbing structure, which could revolutionise solar technology. **The flower**, regarded as a “sun-fed intelligence,” symbolises perpetual renewal and adaptive creativity. **The bird**, inspired by Nobel Laureate Giorgio Parisi’s pioneering flocking studies, embodies “the power of collective intelligence — an emergent awareness that transcends individual cognition.”

Director of Museums, Charlotte Day, comments: “Chus Martínez’s visionary approach champions arts’ capacity to drive social change. Her exhibitions create space for exercising new connections and modes of awareness and encouraging meaningful dialogue across disciplines.”

Martínez adds: “At a time when fantasies of domination – technological or otherwise – threaten to upend our sense of equality, we urgently need spaces that train free thought. A relevant society is one where many forms of knowledge flourish, inspiring new languages for thinking and feeling together.”

Participating artists include: Adrian Mauriks, Agnieszka Polska, Alan Craiger-Smith, Alexa Karolinski & Ingo Niermann, Alexandra Copeland, Ann Lislegaard, Anouk Tschanz, Anthony Romagnano, Archie Barry, Barbara A Swarbrick, Benjamin Armstrong, Brent Harris, Carol Murphy, Daphne Mohajer va Pesaran, David Noonan, Derek Tumala, Din Matamoro, Eduardo Navarro, Gracia Haby & Louise Jennison, Harold Munkara, Heather B Swann, Helen Ganalmirriwuy Garrawurra, Helen Maudsley, Ian Wayne Abdullah, Inge King AM, Ingela Ihrman, Jane Jin Kaisen, Joan Jonas, John Pule, Josie Papieluk, Judith Pungkarta Inkamala, Julia Mensch, Kate Daw, Lauren Burrow, Liss Fenwick, Lorraine Jenyns, Malcolm Howie, Margaret Rarru Garrawurra, Marian Tubbs, Mel O’Callaghan, Mia Boe, Miles Howard-Wilks, Nabilah Nordin, Naomi Hobson, Neha Choksi, Noemi Pfister, Noriko Nakamura, Percy Grainger, Pippin Louise Drysdale, Rivane Neuenschwander & Cao Guimarães, Rosslynd Piggott, Rrikin Burarrwaja, Salvador Dalí, Sattar Stas Shārifulla, Taloi Havini, Tamara Henderson, Teelah George, Tessa Laird, and Tony Warburton.

Martínez has collaborated with **exhibition designer Nguyen Le** and **graphic designer Ana Dominguez studio**.

A series of publications, titled **Art Museums Papers**, authored by Chus Martínez, Laura Tripaldi, and Neha Choksi will accompany the exhibition, offering further insights into its themes.

The exhibition will feature a vibrant public program featuring talks, performances and an opening weekend celebration with local and international artists on Friday 21 and Saturday 22 February 2026. Also built around the exhibition will be the Potter’s annual Interdisciplinary Forum under the theme of Intelligence on Saturday 9 May 2026.

This will be the second exhibition presented at the Potter since its re-opening in May 2025 following the acclaimed exhibition *65,000 Years: A Short History of Australian Art*.

Ends

MEDIA CONTACTS: To request interviews, further information or imagery please contact:
Clare Callaghan, clare@articulateadvisory.com 0450 223 485

Claire Martin, claire@articulateadvisory.com 0414 437 588

IMAGES: Available [here](#)

ABOUT POTTER MUSEUM OF ART

The Potter Museum of Art is a dynamic site for education and exhibitions that connect to the key issues and cultural debates of our time. The Potter is an industry leader in collections and exhibitions-based learning, working with the University of Melbourne's Art Collection and The Potter's exhibition program to engage students from a wide range of faculties and disciplines. The University's Art Collection, of 18,000+ objects, is a rich teaching resource featuring works from Western antiquity to contemporary art, including works by major Indigenous and Australian artists. The Collection is presented in dialogue with loaned works and new commissions to explore issues and build knowledge of historical and contemporary perspectives.

ABOUT CHUS MARTÍNEZ

Chus Martínez leads the Institute Art Gender Nature at FHNW Academy of Arts and Design in Basel. Born in Spain and trained in philosophy and art history, Martínez is regarded as one of Europe's most influential contemporary art curators and theorists. She has held key curatorial roles at El Museo Del Barrio (New York), dOCUMENTA(13), MACBA (Barcelona), director of Frankfurter Kunstverein, and artistic director of Sala Rekalde (Bilbao) and curated national pavilions for Catalonia and Cyprus at the Venice Biennale. Her work has featured at the Istanbul Biennial, Carnegie International, and Bienal de São Paulo, with recent exhibition collaborations at Fondation Beyeler, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, and Castello di Rivoli.

At der TANK, her institute's exhibition space, she commissions works by emerging and established artists including Elena Mazzi, Cecilia Bengolea, and Teresa Solar.

In 2025, Martínez curated the 36th Ljubljana Biennale, embracing art as a space for transformation, speculation, and care. *A velvet Ant, a flower and a bird* at the Potter Museum is Martínez's first project in Australia.

Image captions L-R: Naomi Hobson, *Rare*, 2025. Courtesy the artist and Vivien Anderson Gallery, Melbourne. Rivane Neuenschwander and Cao Guimarães, *Quarta-Feira de Cinzas*, 2006. Courtesy the artists and Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. John Pule, *Hao*, 2024. Courtesy the artist and Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland.