



NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

×  
BUNJIL PLACE GALLERY

# FLORIBUNDA

CURATED BY  
DAVID SEQUEIRA

29 MARCH – 20 JULY  
BUNJIL PLACE GALLERY

 **Bunjil  
Place**

**NATIONAL GALLERY  
OF VICTORIA** NGV





Grace Cossington Smith *Still life with ranunculi* 1926.  
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Gift from the  
Estate of Brian Myddleton Davis AM, 2022 © Estate of  
Grace Cossington Smith

## BUNJIL PLACE FOREWORD

This year we are absolutely thrilled to bring *Floribunda* to Bunjil Place in collaboration with the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV). This partnership shines a spotlight on the incredible NGV Collection, while also solidifying Bunjil Place as a must-visit destination for world-class art, right here in Melbourne's South-East.

Bunjil Place Gallery is a cherished part of the City of Casey community, bringing people together to enjoy exciting exhibitions and programs that inspire, educate, and spark creativity. From the moment young people pick up a pencil, the Gallery supports their creative journey and encourages a lasting connection with the visual arts.

Art helps us connect across time and cultures. While the theme of flowers is something everyone can relate to, this exhibition offers a variety of perspectives that reflect our community's diversity, helping us to better understand one another – something more important now than ever. We are grateful to the NGV for sharing our passion in this project and sharing these important works with us – providing our community the chance to experience an exhibition of this calibre in their own backyard.

Universal access to art is one of our core principles, and partnerships forged in association with this exhibition have enabled us to provide these vital experiences for community connection and wellbeing and are free for everyone to enjoy.

Enthusiasm for this subject matter has been infectious, and we are excited to collaborate with venues across the City of Casey to present a range of flower inspired creative programs and experiences occurring throughout the exhibition period for the community to enjoy.

Our sincere thanks to Dr David Sequeira for his curatorial vision, to Tony Ellwood AM, Director and the entire team of the National Gallery of Victoria for the vast amount of work required to bring this project to life, to AWM Electrical and to our incredible local supporters who have made this all possible – Orana by Balcon, Robert Gordon, Mercedes Benz Berwick, Carlei Wines and Flowers Vasette.

We hope this exhibition provides a moment of brightness and joy to all.

**Cr Stefan Koomen**  
City of Casey Mayor





## NGV FOREWORD

The National Gallery of Victoria is delighted to present *Floribunda*, in partnership with Bunjil Place, and to welcome audiences from the greater Melbourne community to view this beautiful and thoughtfully curated exhibition.

Over two years in the making and with works drawn exclusively from the NGV Collection, *Floribunda* is a vast exploration of floral imagery, design and motifs spanning multiple histories, cultures and art forms. Constituting one of the largest loans in the NGV's history, there are more than 150 works on display, including still life paintings, prints, drawings, sculpture, decorative arts and haute couture fashion. Travelling exclusively to Bunjil Place, this exhibition presents a rare opportunity for local visitors to experience iconic NGV Collection works by Grace Cossington-Smith, Yves Saint-Laurent, Nora Heysen,

Arthur Streeton and many more.

In the first loan of this work since its world premiere as part of the NGV Triennial 2023, Azuma Makoto's *Block flowers* from *A Chaotic Garden* will be re-staged in a mesmerising display of 130 resin-cast flowers, allowing audiences to appreciate the beauty of each flower at the peak of their visual splendour.

The exhibition features a dynamic selection of Australian and international still life paintings - including Margaret Preston's iconic *Flannel flowers* and Dutch floral paintings - elegantly displayed in a floor-to-ceiling salon hang. Works from the NGV's Fashion & Textiles and Asian Art collections are also highlighted in *Floribunda*, with a selection of garments adorned with swirls of floral pattern and objects intricately detailed with marigolds and blossoms.

One of the vital roles of the NGV as a public institution is to share arts and culture with as many people as possible. We have a longstanding history of lending works from our permanent collection of more than 80,000 works to institutions around Australia and the world, and we welcomed the opportunity to share this significant selection of works with the City of Casey community.

I wish to acknowledge the curator of this exhibition, David Sequeira, an artist, curator and Director, Fiona and Sidney Myer Gallery, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne. Working collaboratively with the NGV's curatorial departments, Sequeira has both celebrated and reimagined the NGV's rich holdings of works on this theme.

We are grateful to AWM Electrical for their commitment to our regional touring program, and incredible support towards numerous Australian galleries, and acknowledge their significant leadership in enhancing Australia's cultural landscape.

I warmly congratulate Georgia Cribb, Head of Visual Arts Programming, Bunjil Place for partnering in this ambitious exhibition, and extend my thanks to the many staff who have contributed to this project across Bunjil Place, City of Casey and the NGV.

We are proud to share this remarkable exhibition and invite the whole community to stop by and smell the roses.

**Tony Ellwood AM**  
Director, National Gallery of Victoria

# FLORIBUNDA

IN ART, A FLOWER  
IS NEVER *JUST* A FLOWER

My mother's first name is Rose, and she has always loved flowers. I have learned and continue to learn from her. I think I was about 15 when I realised that for Rose (yes, I call my mother Rose), seeing the Mona Lisa would provide the same joy as a single bloom in our front garden. It is not that one is better than the other or that Rose dislikes the Mona Lisa – it's just that, for her, they both provide the same joy. Rose and I have never talked about this, mostly because there is nothing further to say about it – it is her way of being in the world. I know that Dad loved this about her. For a teenager (or anyone), this can be a challenging point of view. I don't think I had ever thought about joy in this way before. It changed the way I thought about Rose and the sweet-scented lily of the valley in her bridal bouquet and the lush rhododendrons growing on the hills that she passed on the train to boarding school in Simla, India. It changed the way I thought about the intense magenta, crimson and purple fuchsias on our front porch and the heady perfume of old school roses – Mr Lincoln and Fragrant Cloud, growing outside our bedroom window in Essendon. Perhaps this is why I still treasure the card that accompanied the flowers that Rose and Dad sent when I bought my first house in Hughes, Canberra.

Combining all of this with my love of museums and collections, I feel like I was born to curate *Floribunda* and at the same time I also feel like it curated itself. The

climbing rose that stretched across our side fence is a great analogy for the exhibition. The project grew as I shared my ideas. What I discovered is that everyone has a flower story and, quite probably, everyone longs to share their flower story. If you are reading this text, you have a flower story. It became important to acknowledge Rose's relationship to flowers through my curatorship. Through the selection and display of flower related objects, *Floribunda* emerges from a curiosity around the democratic idea that seeing the Mona Lisa and seeing a flower could provide the same joy. My research for the project included talking about flowers to lots of people. Sitting alongside this essay are short interviews with artists Deanne Gilson and Andrew Taylor, and Cherrie Miriklis, Founder & Director Flowers Vasette. I thank these people for generously sharing their reflections.

*Floribunda* sets out to explore the special relationship between humans and flowers. Incorporating painting, ceramics, photography, bark painting, sculpture, installation art, jewellery, textiles, printmaking, drawing and fashion, the exhibition highlights flowers as a persistent subject in a range of art practices, histories and movements. It is hard to imagine human existence without a fascination with flowers. In their article *Humans' Relationship to Flowers as an Example of the Multiple Components of Embodied Aesthetics*, Behavioural Science researchers Ephrat Huss, Kfir Bar Yosef and Michele Zaccai suggest that because it takes physical effort to touch them, collect them, smell them and tend to them, flowers have a relatively unique embodied and relational aesthetic.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, perception of the visual beauty of flowers is inseparable from their colour, texture, scent and the

care required for their growth. In this light, who better than artists, to articulate this poetic and evocative relationship?

A hybrid of 'abundance' and 'flower', the exhibition title *Floribunda* suggests beauty and plenitude. Accordingly, the exhibition comprises over 150 works drawn from the National Gallery of Victoria's (NGV) rich and diverse collections. One of the largest single loans in the NGV's history, *Floribunda* was conceived as a 'Wunderkammer' or 'Cabinet of Curiosities' dedicated to flowers<sup>2</sup>. Part fantasy, part taxonomy, *Floribunda* can be understood as a philosophical democratic approach through which a range of artistic expressions can sit side by side to generate new sensations, readings and insights. The appeal of this Wunderkammer lies in the idea that there is no single hero work of art. Instead, the enchanting intoxication of *Floribunda* arises from the totality of its parts – an expansive profusion of flowers that speaks of tenderness, fragility, resilience, fertility, joy, sorrow, love and the human condition. The project is specially conceived for Bunjil Place, an extensive purpose-built arts complex, gathering place and creative hub located in Melbourne's South-East corridor. Established and managed by the visionary City of Casey, Bunjil Place has developed a reputation for innovative collaborative exhibitions which embrace these themes for its diverse audiences.<sup>3</sup>

Focussing on still life genre and decorative motif, (as opposed to flowers in a garden), *Floribunda* draws attention to the symbolism of flowers. The flowers in *Floribunda* are a potent reminder that flowers have always been there. Flowers are embedded in births, deaths, romances, marriages, dinner parties,

religious rituals, coronations and other rites of passage. Fashioned in lace lingerie, printed on underwear or sprayed in a perfumed mist on the body, flowers have a place in the most delicate and intimate of human rituals and experiences. Given that flowers have always been there, one of the questions that arises is why now? What does it mean to examine the relationship between flowers and art in 2025? The themes and ideas associated with temporality may provide some insight. Perhaps artists are drawn to flowers because they locate us in the present. The relatively short life span of most flowers means that their 'peak' is momentary. Oblivious to environmental, social or political complexities and injustices, this small window occurs regardless of what else is happening in the world. In this sense the act of being with a flower, that is, experiencing it, noticing its visual subtleties and being aware of its aura, is a call to be present – to ground oneself and surrender to the now.

This understanding on the 'now' is further echoed in the curatorial methodology for the exhibition – *Floribunda* is a decidedly transcultural, transhistorical, interdisciplinary project. The harmful limitations of singular linear narratives are more visible now than they have ever been. The reverberations of colonialism echo with booming resonance, placing art museums at the most significant crossroad in their colonial histories. *Floribunda* has been curated to highlight the intersections, problems and possibilities for collections.

The virtue of proximity generates a new kind of inter-relational connectivity between the early 20<sup>th</sup> century photographs of waterlilies by Lorraine Barber, the 1970s paintings on paper of waterlily bulbs







by Papua New Guinea artist Meyibor, the 1965 bark painting of waterlilies by Charles Boyun and an ancient Japanese Buddha standing on a stylised waterlily. Individually the works maintain their own specificity, collectively they speak of a global understanding of serenity, enlightenment, cyclic change and physical and spiritual nourishment that transcends standard concepts of time. This type of curatorship provides a rare opportunity to break free from linearity and understand and experience time as malleable. The rule is very simple: objects from different histories, brought together purposefully and artfully, form their own special time.

Although there is no strict order for viewing the exhibition, its design can be imagined as a rose in the process of blooming. Centrally placed at the heart of the exhibition is a shrine like installation of *Block flowers* from the *A Chaotic Garden* project 2023, by Azuma Makoto. The work consists of 130 plant specimens, collected at their visual peak and suspended in resin. A meditation on the competing concepts of immortality and temporality, Makoto's flowers appear to be held in a liminal state somewhere between life and death.<sup>4</sup> Surrounding this installation, other clusters of works joyously unfold like petals to deepen this reflection.

The major salon-hang of floral still life paintings include works from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century. Works by well-known figures of Australian art, Margaret Preston, Arthur Streeton, Grace Cossington Smith and John Brack are shown alongside lesser-known artists such as Guelda Pyke and Esther Paterson. A mash up of Western art 'isms', this section of the exhibition highlights the consistent presence of

flowers throughout major European and European-influenced movements – from Impressionism to Cubism. At first glance this wall is glorious and celebratory. Close inspection reveals a multi-faceted layering of emotions that can relate to the conditions of the world at large. The freedom of early twentieth century modernity, the Great Depression of the 1920s, World War II and the flowering of post-war optimism are suggested within this selection of works. Joyous, introspective, surreal and melancholic, this mix of paintings highlights the complexity and fecundity of the subject matter. Clearly, a painting of flowers is not just a painting of flowers. It is a window to a world of feelings and associations including warming the heart and bringing a tear to the eye.

There are two distinct approaches taken by fashion designers in the selection of garments opposite the salon-hang of paintings. Linda Jackson's *Flame waratah* 1984, has a sculptural quality that references the rich colouring and intricate structure of a waratah. The garment is designed to envelope the model in the intensity of these unique qualities. Other garments incorporate flowers that are either printed, woven, embroidered or applied in 3D form as an embellishment. Marrithiyel artist and designer Paul McCann's *Gumnut, ball gown* 2021, and *Sovereignty gumnut tiara set* 2021, represents a composite of these two approaches. Its billowing green hand painted organza and gumnuts are clearly inspired by the flowering eucalypt, while its silhouette calls to mind 1950s opulence, elegance and glamour.

On another wall, Jim Dine's series of twenty-seven black and white prints *The Temple of Flora* 1984, is interspersed with

verses of Sufi poetry. A fusion of East and West, this merging of the mystical and spiritual dimension of Islam with Dine's sensitive observations of flowers suggests that flowers are an earthly delight that provide an access to experiencing and understanding divinity. Clustered nearby is a suite of cabinets containing heavily decorated international and Australian ceramic vessels, tiles and jewellery. Together with textiles from India and a Turkmen robe, these groupings highlight the importance of flowers as decorative motifs across a range of cultures. The presence of flowers imbues these objects with an extraordinary sense of beauty, love, growth and transformation.

The pairing of Deanne Gilson's suite of ten paintings, *Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge* 2022, with twenty prints selected from the monumental folio of coloured engravings, *Banks' Florilegium*, drawn 1770–1784 is perhaps the most poignant and revealing grouping of works in *Floribunda*. Hanging the paintings of Gilson, a Wadawurrung woman of Aboriginal and Australian/English descent at eye level, literally centres Indigenous knowledge whilst simultaneously pushing colonial understandings to the periphery. Clearly demonstrating the real possibilities of curatorship – generating contemporary readings of historical works and historical contexts for contemporary works – this grouping demonstrates how a museum collection can articulate multiple contested histories simultaneously. Knowledge of flowers handed down over millennia and rendered lovingly and powerfully within a context of lived experience, once rejected, now assumes its rightful position alongside the meticulous investigations of revered botanist Sir Joseph Banks.

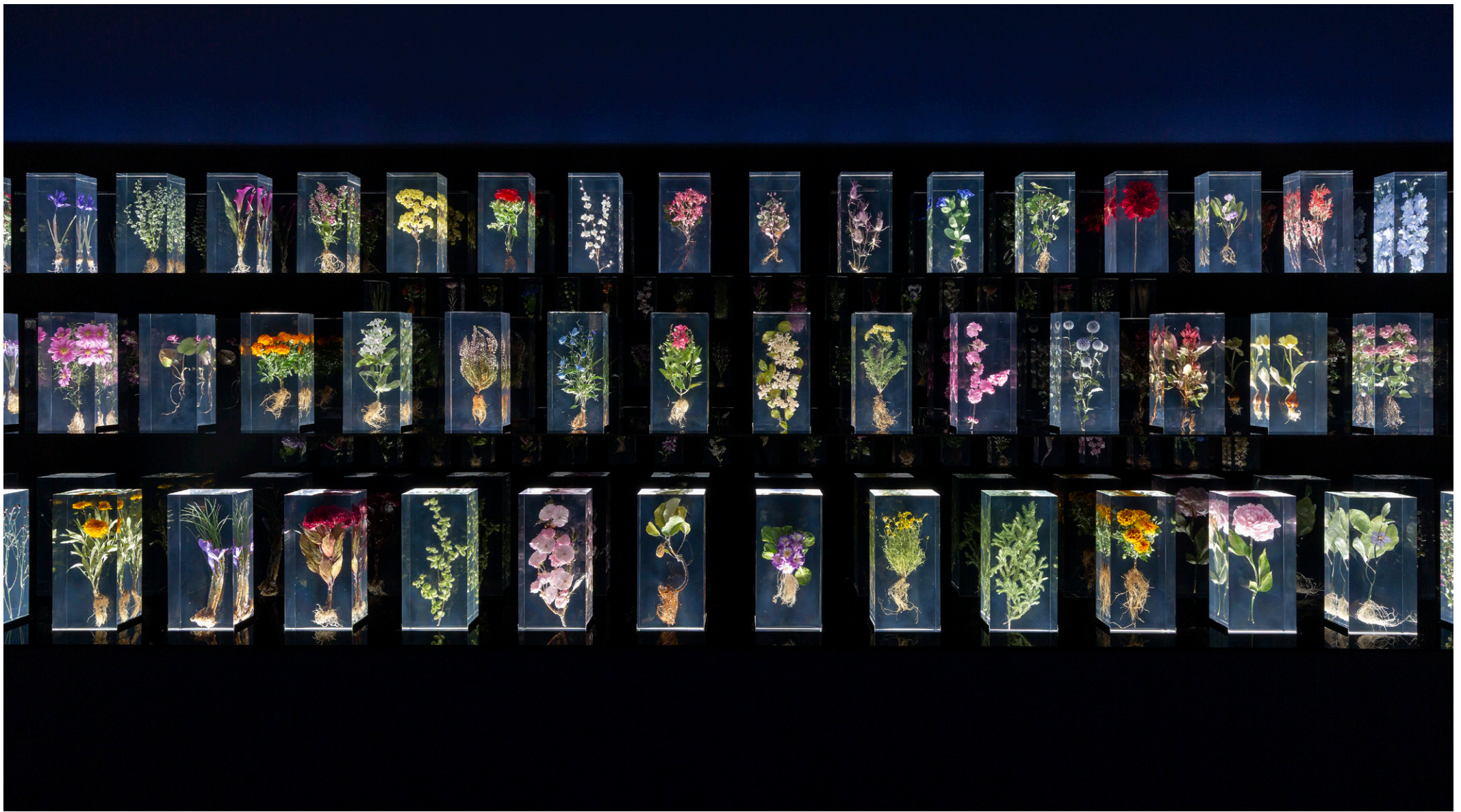
Given its subject matter, it would be easy to get caught up in the sumptuous nature of *Floribunda*. It might even be easy to think about it as an exhibition that doesn't require much thinking. Whilst these responses would be valid, they overlook the invitation implicit in the exhibition. *Floribunda* invites audiences to reflect upon their own lives, through the realm of flowers, magically explored by artists across generations. It is an invitation to allow memories to surface, to consider that which is often taken for granted and to be deeply moved by the simplicity and profundity of a flower.

Associate Professor, **Dr David Sequeira**  
Guest Curator, *Floribunda*,  
National Gallery of Victoria  
× Bunjil Place Gallery

- 1 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5867485/> accessed 15 Feb 2025
- 2 Popular in Europe in the 16th–18th centuries, A Wunderkammer, or “cabinet of curiosities,” was a room or display case filled with extraordinary objects from art, nature, science, and culture. Over time, they influenced the development of museums and scientific classification.
- 3 Bunjil Place opened in 2017 and includes an outdoor community plaza, theatre, multipurpose studio, function centre, library, gallery and City of Casey Customer Service Centre. The City of Casey is one of this country's fastest growing regions with over 140 languages and 120 faiths represented. The region welcomes more than 10,000 new residents each year from all parts of the world, with a high number of residents from refugee or asylum seeker backgrounds.
- 4 These ideas are expressed in the NGV curatorial file notes for Azuma Makoto

*Dedicated to Rose Sequeira*





**Azuma Makoto** *Block flowers* 2023 (detail) from the *A Chaotic Garden* project 2023. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Commissioned by the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with funds donated by Bagôt Gjergja Foundation, Andrew Penn AO and Kallie Blauhorn, Michael Buxton AM and Janet Buxton, Paul and Samantha Cross, Anthony and Clare Cross, Cameron Oxley and Bronwyn Ross, and Woods5 Foundation, 2024 © Azuma Makoto



## DEANNE GILSON

IN CONVERSATION  
WITH DAVID SEQUEIRA

**DS:** How do the Indigenous flowers depicted in your work reflect Wadawurrung cultural knowledge and traditions?

**DG:** The plants reflect Wadawurrung knowledge by me simply painting them as a Wadawurrung woman. The plants basically draw upon plant species from my Country, with a few exceptions like the waratah which interrogates Margaret Preston's appropriations of First Peoples iconography. Some plants are food plants, ceremony plants and fire knowledge holders, artefact usage plants and so on.

**DS:** What is the relationship between your paintings and the work of Sir Joseph Banks?

**DG:** Simply that I am stating these are about reclaiming cultural knowledge and overriding Western theories and ways in which he used the plants. He was looking for new species to claim and in a way his ego played a part in that. I am showing the importance of cultural learning through the plants and that knowledge was missed in his gathering of plants. I am simply showing the other side of the missing information not for my ego or to claim I discovered anything, simply to reintroduce our lost knowledges through art.

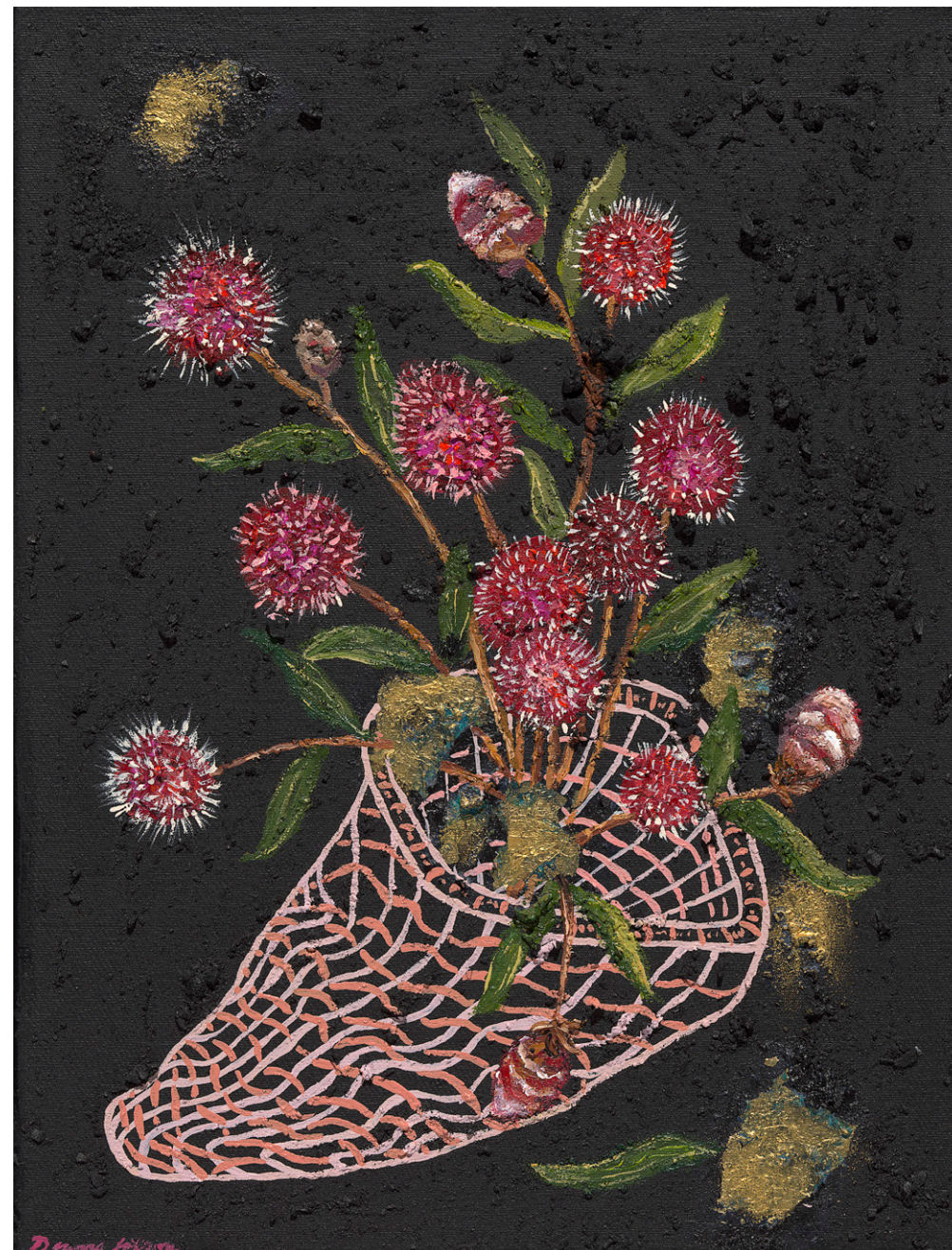
**DS:** What challenges do you face when capturing the details of flowers in your art?

**DG:** I do not care about the finer details, although I do love them. For me details are a Western thing and not part of my emotional and intuitive response towards the work. I sit and paint in quiet, talking only to my dogs and listening to the birds, I like to form a peaceful connection to each work. I paint very slowly and turn my phone off. The main challenges are Ballarat's cold weather and then if a flower is not in season. I have dried out plants from most of my favourites though and grow many trees in my garden.

**DS:** Many of your works feature flowers in baskets or containers. Can you share about the difference between flowers growing in the ground and flowers that have been gathered?

**DG:** When I paint the plants either in a basket or sitting on the ochre or charcoal background, they are always floating as if sitting on the ground itself. The baskets are not drawing on the still life genre and in fact only represent Indigenous ways of being and knowledge that precedes Western art genres. They form deep connections with Country, obviously, and also to our Creation Story. They reflect back the colonial gaze of us being similar to flora and fauna. This is a myth, as our connections are in fact at one with Country in a spiritual sense. It is highly political at times and not just a plant, however I have made my peace with them and really am trying my upmost to remove the Western influences or frameworks and bring it back to celebrating Country and all in it.

**Dr Deanne Gilson** is a proud Wadawurrung woman, multidisciplinary visual artist and Blak Designer



**Deanne Gilson** *Before Joseph Banks, Our Baskets and Plants Held Sacred Knowledge, Hakea (Pin Cushion) Dilly Bag 2022.* National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2023 © Deanne Gilson







# CHERRIE MIRIKLIS

IN CONVERSATION  
WITH DAVID SEQUEIRA

**DS:** What is your personal connection with flowers? Why have you chosen to work with them for several decades? Do you think you would ever get tired of working with flowers?

**CM:** My connection with flowers is deeply personal and emotional. From a young age, I was captivated by the beauty and symbolism of flowers, which ultimately led me to pursue a career in floristry. From the steps of my parents' greengrocer, as a young girl, I wanted people to enjoy the beauty of nature at home. What draws me in is not just the aesthetics, but the way flowers can speak to people, evoke memories, and mark significant moments in their lives. Over the years, I've realised that flowers are more than just a business to me – they are a way to connect with others, to celebrate, to mourn, to love. Each arrangement tells a different story. I can't imagine ever getting tired of working with them; the beauty and complexity of nature continuously inspire me.

**DS:** How would you describe your floral artistry?

**CM:** My floral artistry blends elegance with a sense of natural spontaneity. I'm inspired by the shapes, textures, and colours of the flowers themselves, allowing them to guide my design, including other products such as fabrics, fruits and metals. I aim for arrangements that feel

timeless but also fresh, always ensuring that each piece has a story of its own. I love combining classic flowers with unexpected elements, creating something unique that feels both natural and deliberate.

**DS:** Given the unique place of flowers in people's lives, being a florist seems much more than selecting and displaying flowers. Can you share a little about your conversations with clients about flowers?

**CM:** Absolutely! When I meet with clients, I always start by listening to their stories and understanding the emotions they want to convey through flowers. Flowers are such a personal choice, and the conversations often go beyond just discussing what colours or types of flowers they like. For instance, I worked on a memorial for a client whose mother had passed. She wanted a tribute that reflected her mother's love of lilacs, as they had special memories attached to them. By incorporating lilacs into the arrangement, I was able to help honour that bond.

**DS:** How do you choose flowers to match the tone of an event, such as a wedding or memorial?

**CM:** Choosing flowers for an event always starts with understanding the atmosphere and sentiment of the occasion. For weddings, I focus on the couple's personalities, their story, and the overall aesthetic of their day – whether it's romantic, rustic, or modern. For a memorial, the tone is much more delicate, and I consider the emotions of the family and the legacy of the person who has passed. For example, soft pastels or white flowers often work well for



memorials because of their calming and respectful nature. I also think about the season, as it plays a large role in setting the tone. Ultimately, the flowers should complement the mood of the event and reflect the essence of those involved.

**DS:** How do you approach designing arrangements? Do your arrangements tell a story? Convey emotion? Symbolise values and ideas?

**CM:** Yes, my arrangements absolutely tell a story and convey emotion. Each one is a unique expression, designed to speak to the occasion or the person it's meant for. I think of floral arrangements as living art – they should inspire feelings, whether it's joy, remembrance, or love. I also believe flowers have the power to symbolise values and ideas – for instance, peace can be

conveyed with lilies, while strength can be symbolised with roses or sunflowers. Ultimately, I see each arrangement to communicate an idea or an emotion that transcends words.

**Cherrie Miriklis** is the Founder & Director of Flowers Vasette







# ANDREW TAYLOR

IN CONVERSATION  
WITH DAVID SEQUEIRA

**DS:** When did you first get interested in flowers and why were you drawn to them?

**AT:** I grew up in the suburbs of Mount Waverley and there was very little culture in the house. I was at an age where music was such an integral part of my awakening. I was obsessed with a band called New Order. I found their music so sophisticated and so fascinating. They had an album called *Power, Corruption and Lies*. The cover of the album shows a detail of a painting of flowers by Henri Fantin-Latour with a photographer's colour chart along the edge. It's as though the painting is interrupted by the contemporary idea of being photographed. Furthermore, it is an album and there is a sculptural, three dimensionality to the ideas in the album. The words in the title of the album, *power, corruption* and *lies* are forever associated with the ubiquitous nature of the flowers in Fantin-Latour's painting.

I found that album cover, such an extraordinary reminder of the nature of time – late 19<sup>th</sup> century and late 20<sup>th</sup> century coexisting. I still think of the artist Fantin-Latour, looking at the flowers and painting them quickly before they died. Flowers can only look the same way for a particular amount of time. How did Fantin-Latour have that time? And then thinking of the photographer that took the photo, his piece of time, is his colour bar which asserts, 'I am contemporary, and this is contemporary'. It's no longer about

the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Fantin-Latour's flowers have a contemporary place in this moment of time. For me, flowers are part of my thinking about New Order and this sort of detached, euphoric, ironic feeling. It's a classic album cover, isn't it? You know, it's so beautiful and bizarre – wrong, but completely right. The cover set me up to listen and think about What's my time? What do I see in my time? What am I making in my time? How am I making this my time?

**DS:** Are there any particular memories, places or people that inspire the use of flowers in your work?

**AT:** I remember being 16 years old and we had this school trip to Canberra. We saw an exhibition called the *Great Impressionists: Masterpieces from the Courtauld Collection*. There were a few paintings by Manet including *A Bar at the Folies-Bergere*, 1882. I was struck by the outlandish pace, the outlandish confidence and the outlandish beauty in the brush strokes. The confidence of Manet's brush strokes is totally of its time and its moment. I knew I was looking at something that was over one hundred years old, painted by a dead man. However, there was a euphoria, there was a lie. Manet painted something that was supple and alive. This is a visually complex painting with the barmaid and the mirror behind her reflecting the chandelier and the lively crowd... and there on the bar is a little still life – a tiny vase of flowers that is just mind bogglingly beautiful.

For me there is a sense of marking and capturing time. The flowers mark that moment in time where the girl is in the mirror. Everything is still. The flower shows a time and the girl's gesture shows a



Henri Fantin-Latour *Dahlia* 1866, oil on canvas. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne Felton Bequest, 1906.

time. What we're looking at in the mirror shows time and we're trapped in that time. In the painting there's the sense that everything is in freefall but everything is still. For me, almost 150 years since it was painted, I am taken over by that freefall and stillness.

**DS:** Are there any other periods of history that impact you?

**AT:** A distant relative had given our family some Chinese porcelain. As a child, I was always intrigued by touching the porcelain. It's this beautiful surface and on it was a Chinese landscape, but in the forefront of the landscape is a floral arrangement. I still think about every brush stroke of the artist at the time but on the porcelain, it's

suspended in time and it gets suppressed in the glaze or rather, the glaze holds it still. There is a kind of reckoning. The flowers are fresh, but they are frozen and there is a sense of something in time that has been trapped and stopped, but is still transmitting something to me - it is alive, but it's inert.

**DS:** Could you share a little bit about your personal understanding of the symbolic and metaphoric quality of flowers?

**AT:** I moved to Los Angeles about 20 years ago and we were living in the hills. It's a strange contradiction because you have the landscape that is still wild and uncontrolled, but you also live in an





Annette Bezor *No* 1991, oil and synthetic polymer paint on galvanized iron. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Margaret Stewart Endowment, 1991.  
© Annette Bezor

extraordinary metropolis of 11 million people. At the time I was thinking how do I paint this? or what do I paint about this? I was completely overwhelmed and everything I did seemed to be a cliché.

I was living in a house and these huge orchids would be delivered. It was before the orchid craze hit Melbourne and I'd never seen anything like them. I became so obsessed with looking at these orchids in a room and I did a whole suite of drawings. It wasn't enough to draw the orchid, and I cut them out and collaged them on top of the drawings. And again – what is that frozen moment? How do I show that sense of time?

My wife happened to be in a TV show that opened in America whilst I was living in LA. She was stuck in the lockdown in Sydney and all her friends were sending huge bouquets of flowers. So we suddenly had a house that was filled with these giant bouquets and I photographed them to show her. But soon the flowers were dying and photographing them seemed like such a hollow gesture. I decided to begin to draw them – you're drawing phonetically trying to work out a way to capture it all. I started trying to just capture what's there – seeing what's there and then where it would lead. After a while, I figured it just wasn't enough.

Back in my studio in St Kilda, I had been working with silver nitrate mirrors on another project and was thinking about how these flowers, even though they were local, were gifts from people elsewhere. They have been picked and put together and they arrive in St Kilda. They're in my house, they're in my moment. I began making some works where I put the images of flowers behind silver nitrate and onto glass. The flowers suspended in the mirror, could rebound and recalibrate. And for

me, it was this idea of capturing a gesture and making another gesture, which is mirroring the idea back at something.

**DS:** Could you share a little bit more about life and death?

**AT:** Flowers come as a gesture, but they're in fast time. They're not going to be there for long. They're there to be seen. They are decadent in a way... the transport involved, the mechanisms in their growth, the orchestration of them show us our transience. We, like the flowers are going to die. We like the flowers are slowly moving back. We're part of the same transaction. We're part of the same gesture in life and in death. It's the simultaneous duality of life and decay that interests me.

I am interested in exploring my capacity to capture this and make something of presence. I want my flowers to be charismatic things that reveal themselves slowly. Flowers manufacture a feeling which brings us closer to death, but also closer to life.

**Andrew Taylor** is an Australian painter and printmaker





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The Netherlands, *Flowerpiece* late 17th century (detail), oil on canvas, 70.4 x 54.6 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.  
Gift of Mr Norton E. Grimwade in memory of his wife Mrs Norton E. Grimwade, 1945

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