



Art

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‘Impossible task’: NGV to take largest international exhibition of Indigenous art to US

The show, which will tour for three years across North America beginning in 2025, will feature the gallery’s ‘absolute masterpieces’ - including works by Emily Kam Kngwararray and Albert Namatjira

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The largest international exhibition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art will open in 2025 at Washington DC’s National Gallery of [Art](#) and tour for three years across North America.

Titled The Stars We Do Not See: Australian Indigenous Art, the show will feature more than 200 works from the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) collection from the 19th century to the present day - including masterpieces by the late Emily Kam Kngwararray, Rover Thomas, Sally Gabori and Albert Namatjira.

The exhibition takes on an “impossible task”, says curator Myles Russell-Cook, “to fully capture the diversity of First Nations communities and art from Australia”. Rising to the challenge, the exhibition will feature works from across the continent - including art hotspots such as the central desert, Arnhem Land and the Torres Strait - and a range of media, from bark and canvas paintings to textile, video and neon works.



📍 Myles Russell-Cook, senior curator of Australian and First Nations art at NGV, with works by Reko Rennie that will feature in The Stars We Do Not See. Photograph: Eugene Hyland/National Gallery of Victoria

“It’s about really showing that [Indigenous art](#) is as diverse as Indigenous people,” says Russell-Cook. The exhibition also aims to “highlight the extraordinary time - 65,000 years - that Aboriginal people have been custodians of the land in Australia,” he says.

Among the exhibition’s highlights will be monumental works never previously exhibited in North America, including Kngwararray’s 1995 masterpiece Big Yam Dreaming, measuring a whopping 8 by 3 metres.

“We really are sending the absolute masterpieces,” says Russell-Cook. “The main bit of feedback I got [from the NGV’s First Nations strategic council and elder in residence] was, if you’re going to do this, do it properly.”

The exhibition includes politically charged recent works from artists including Richard Bell and the late Destiny Deacon, exploring [Blak identity](#) and issues such as Indigenous deaths in custody. These, Russell-Cook believes, will be particularly resonant for North American audiences: “I think people will be surprised to realise that we share this kind of politics and this activism.”

The NGV’s announcement follows several major international touring exhibitions of Aboriginal art in the last three years, including the National Museum of Australia’s [Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters](#), which began its European tour in the UK in 2021 and is showing in Finland from next month; the [Art Gallery of South Australia’s Tarnanthi showcase](#), which toured France and Germany; and the National Gallery of Australia’s major survey [Ever Present: First Peoples Art of Australia](#), which toured to Singapore and New Zealand.



📷 The late Destiny Deacon in her studio. Photograph: Tim Carrafa

With a landmark solo exhibition of Anmatyerr artist Emily Kam Ngwarray's work set to open at Tate Modern in London in 2025, it seems Aboriginal art is enjoying an unprecedented international spotlight.

Tony Ellwood, director of the NGV, places this within a broader global shift towards "more awareness of not only Australian First Nations but global First Nations art. I'm certainly seeing it at art fairs and programming in the northern hemisphere."

Even so, Ellwood says the NGV's exhibition - which will be the largest touring endeavour in its history - represents a "phenomenal" undertaking by its North American partners.

"The cost of sending major works overseas is a big ask on [international] venues," he says. "And that's why Australian visual culture traditionally doesn't get [international exhibitions]: because they just think, 'Well, there isn't the awareness or interest.' So for them to be saying 'We'll create that interest with you, and create a profile for your artists' - it's quite phenomenal."

The Stars We Do Not See: Australian Indigenous Art will open at the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, in 2025, and tour to the Denver Art Museum, Colorado; Portland Art Museum, Oregon; Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts; and Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto