

January 2016



John Cuningham 2013

Transformational gifts to the Foundation

As you may have read in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in November, the Art Gallery of New South Wales Foundation has received two of the largest bequests in the history of AGNSW. The two bequests will together add over \$21 million to the endowment fund, increasing the Foundation capital base from \$35 million to over \$56 million. This is certainly the most exciting Foundation news in my time here to date. This surge in Foundation funds will significantly increase its annual income, allowing AGNSW to expand its acquisition program for artworks of the highest calibre for its collection.

I am extremely grateful for the foresight and generosity of two Sydney philanthropists, John Fairlie Cuningham and Stephen Watson. The Bequests section of this newsletter includes a piece about John, which was written by close family friends, Christopher Dawson and Charles Alexander. The next newsletter will include a piece about Stephen, written by his niece, Dorothy Griffiths.

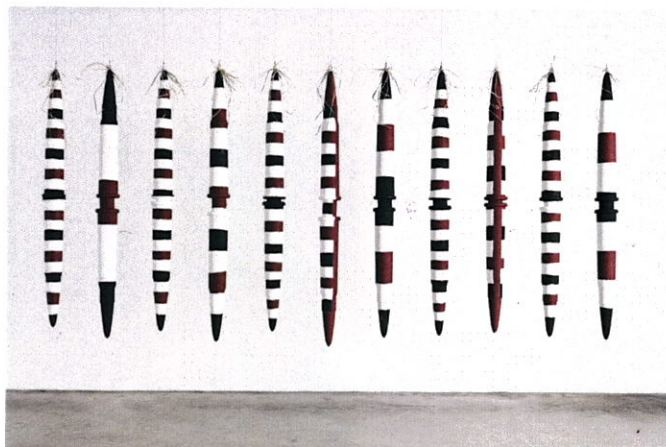
After leaving legacies to family members and friends, John Cuningham, who died in January 2015, left the Foundation 60% of his estate, worth over \$15 million, and Stephen Watson, who died in May, left the Foundation the remainder of his estate, worth over \$6.5 million.

Bequest funds have played a vital role in building the AGNSW collections. In reading the curators' reports in this newsletter you will see that bequest funds have been attributed as the funding source of many works for the collections; they include those of Mervyn Horton, Margaret Tuckson, Wendy Barron, Kathleen Buchanan May, John Gillespie and Russell Mills.

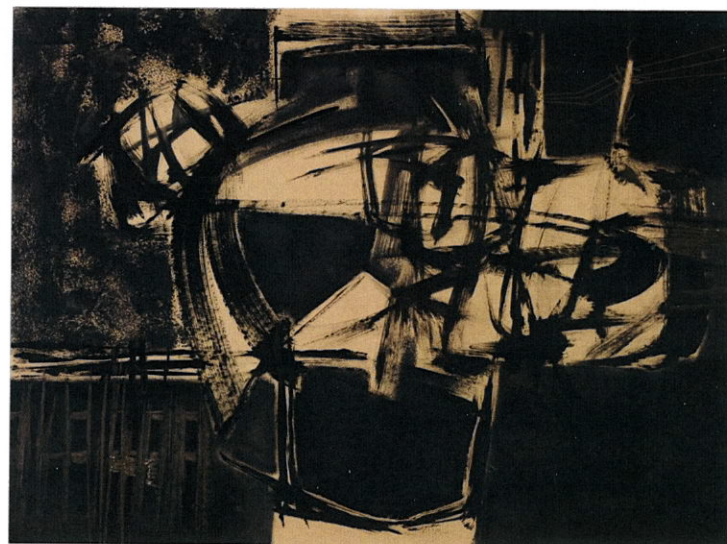
Prior to the Cuningham bequest, the largest bequest was that of Mervyn Horton, valued at close to \$12 million in today's terms, which has been the lead funder of AGNSW's collection of international art. Other important bequests, such as those of Ed and Goldie Sternberg, Ken and Yasuko Myer and Mollie Gowing, have helped build the Chinese, Japanese and Indigenous collections. I want to take this opportunity to thank Jane Wynter for establishing this remarkable program and Rowena Danziger for the role she plays as Bequest Club patron.

The extraordinary philanthropy of John Cuningham and Stephen Watson will ensure that AGNSW and, in time, Sydney Modern will be able to showcase the best art available, for the people of New South Wales.

Michael Brand
Director



Tony Albert and Alair Pambegan *Frontier wars (Flying Fox Story Place)* 2014
raffia, natural pigment and acrylic on wood
Purchased with funds provided by the Aboriginal Collection Benefactors 2015
© Tony Albert



Thomas Gleghorn *Untitled* 1960
ink, oil, scraping out on cream wove paper
Australian Prints, Drawings & Watercolours Benefactors Fund 2015
© Thomas Gleghorn

ABORIGINAL COLLECTION BENEFACTORS (ACB)

The Gallery was fortunate to recently acquire the major work *Frontier wars (Flying Fox Story Place)* 2014 by Tony Albert and Alair Pambegan. This work examines incidents of the colonial frontier and clan designs that are fundamentally attached to place – in essence title deeds – to highlight the ownership of country that was not respected. The striking minimalist design relates to Kalben, the story place for the flying fox, which Pambegan's family holds responsibility for. The forms it is painted on are reminiscent of the sculptural objects made within Wik country for ceremony; however, on closer inspection, it is evident that each of these forms comprises two bullets joined end to end. This references the large bullets that dominate Albert's *Yininmadyemi: thou didst let fall* 2015, a public sculpture in Hyde Park which commemorates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who have served Australia. The bullets are replicated here and painted with Pambegan's clan design to make comment on the unofficial wars in which Indigenous people have defiantly defended their country.

Last year we received the generous support of Vicki Olsson towards the acquisition of Indigenous art by artists from the Torres Strait Islands, which we will be announcing at a special event this year. Vicki has been a long-term supporter of our Indigenous collection, having joined ACB when it was launched in 2006. Other highlights of this year's program include a visit to Ray Wilson's private collection; a preview of *Millingimbi*, the Gallery's exceptional collection of bark

paintings and sculpture from Millingimbi in central Arnhem Land; a viewing of *When silence falls*, which includes our newly acquired work by Judy Watson; and an evening event as part of the wonderful 20th Biennale of Sydney, which will feature a number of Indigenous artists.

AUSTRALIAN PRINTS, DRAWINGS & WATERCOLOURS (PDW)

2015 has already been marked by the acquisition of an outstanding group of Australian drawings, watercolours and prints, made possible entirely through the generosity of our benefactors.

The Australian PDW Benefactor Fund enabled the purchase of a rare and strong abstract expressionist drawing by Thomas Gleghorn, *Untitled* 1960, from the collection of the late Margaret Tuckson. Gleghorn was prominent in Sydney in the 1950s and '60s when he was praised for his 'sweeping, rich, black brush-work combined with dense, yet fresh washes of tone' – aptly describing the Gallery's new drawing.

The Wendy Barron Bequest Fund has facilitated the purchase of a marvellous watercolour by Julian Ashton, *Mosman's Bay* 1888. Ashton was a major figure in the late 19th-century Sydney art world and his legacy continues today, not just through his work and eponymous art school still operating in The Rocks, but also through his role as an early trustee of this Gallery. He argued forcefully for the Gallery to collect the best art of its day, and many of the paintings acquired during his tenure still take pride of place on the walls of our 19th-century Australian galleries. *Mosman's Bay* reminds us



Julian Ashton *Mosman's Bay* 1888
pencil, watercolour on paper
Wendy Barron Bequest Fund 2015

of the important place Mosman played in Australian art and the development of a national school of landscape painting; our new watercolour captures the spirit of the age, when artists sought to capture the distinctive Australian light and landscape by working en plein air. Ashton was a regular resident of the harbourside artist camps in the 1880s and was among a number to paint and draw the Mosman wharf and tearooms, then a leisure spot for Sydneysiders.

A major purchase has been Mary Tonkin's ambitious and monumental charcoal drawing *Between two logs, Kalorama* 2013–14, displayed in the inaugural Dobell Australian Drawing Biennial 2014. Paradoxically intimate yet grand, the drawing encourages a temporal and physical relationship between viewer and object due to its complexity and scale. An exceptional addition to the Gallery's collection, it was only possible due to the John Gillespie Fund, to date the most generous bequest made to PDW; it also funded the 2013 acquisition of Joy Hester's remarkable *Figure with scales* 1957.

Another purchase made possible through bequest funds was that of four stunning still life gouaches by Lucy Culliton through the Kathleen Buchanan May Bequest, which is dedicated to the purchase of Australian still life watercolours. These delightful paintings of flowers cut from the artist's country garden bring Culliton's work into the collection for the first time.



Ross Laurie *Walcha III* 2013
ink, charcoal, pastel, collage on board
Dobell Biennial Acquisition Fund 2015
© Ross Laurie

We have been able to purchase a considerable body of contemporary Australian drawing by artists shown in the Dobell Biennial 2014, thanks to the continuing support of the Sir William Dobell Art Foundation. These include a group of Sydney landscape drawings by Tom Carment; 30 evocative charcoal drawings of the far western New South Wales desert landscape by Peter Sharp; a powerful abstract drawing, *Walcha III* 2013 by Ross Laurie; and an unsentimental gouache of an eroded Braidwood riverbed by John R Walker.

The collection has also been enhanced by gifts of works of art. Longstanding PDW supporters Pamela and Hanns Schüttler have given a collection of Australian and European prints to the Gallery, including works by Kenneth Jack, Graham Fransella, Elaine Haxton, George Barker, and two darkly expressive Geoffrey Ricardo *Dark city*-narrative aquatints that take the artist's printmaking in the collection to an impressive new level. Other notable gifts include prints from artists Elizabeth Cummings and Patsy Payne; a group of E Warner's 1920s etchings, given by his son Charles Warner; and two suites of colour screenprints by Sydney Ball and Graeme Kuo, from master printmaker Michelle Perry. Drawings by Dobell Biennial 2014 exhibitors John Wolseley, Peter Sharp and Gosia Wlodarczak were also given, through the generosity of both the artists themselves and donor Dr Andrew Lu.

Anne Ryan
Curator Australian art