

# MAJOR GIFT STRENGTHENS NEWCASTLE ART GALLERY'S COLLECTION AHEAD OF EXPANSION

Philanthropists Simon and Catriona Mordant have donated 25 significant artworks to Newcastle Art Gallery in their largest single institutional gift, perfectly timed as the gallery prepares to double its exhibition space in 2026.

By Robert Buratti

Newcastle Art Gallery has received its largest single donation of artworks from prominent philanthropists **Simon Mordant AO** and **Catriona Mordant AM**, with 25 significant works joining the gallery's collection as it prepares for a major expansion.

The substantial gift comes at a pivotal time for the institution, which is in the final stages of doubling its exhibition space through an ambitious redevelopment project designed by Clare Design in collaboration with Smith and Tzannes Architects and Arup Engineers.

Gallery Director Laretta Morton OAM expressed her excitement about the partnership, noting her long-standing admiration for the Mordants' global arts philanthropy. "I was quite overwhelmed to be invited to review their collection and select works that represented the vision for our reimagined gallery – to be locally grounded, nationally engaged and globally minded," Morton said.

The Mordants, who have built their collection over nearly four decades, selected Newcastle Art Gallery based on their confidence in the institution's leadership and ambition. "We believe that art should be seen and enjoyed by the widest possible audience," Simon Mordant explained. "Newcastle was an obvious choice, and we commend Laretta and her predecessors who have worked tirelessly to put art at the centre of the community."

The donated works represent a remarkable diversity of artistic practices, featuring paintings, photography, textiles, installations, prints and sculptures by both Australian and international artists. Notable pieces include:

**Make out (Shadow box 8)** (2008) by Mexican-Canadian media artist **Rafael Lozano-Hemmer** – an interactive digital installation featuring thousands of internet videos that responds to viewer presence, exploring themes of surveillance and the boundaries between public and private spaces.

**Liquid green** (2003) by environmental artist **Janet Laurence** – a significant work that critically examines human impact on the natural world during the Anthropocene era.

**Two works on paper** by Ngarrindjeri artist **Ian Abdulla**, marking the first time this significant artist's work depicting childhood memories along the Murray River will be represented in Newcastle's collection.

The gift also includes works by **María Fernanda Cardoso, Brent Harris, Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro, Hiroyuki Kita, Jamie North, Raquel Ormella, Sangeeta Sandrasegar, Tim Silver, Gemma Smith, Yuken Teruya, Brendan Van Hek and John Young.**

The reimagined Newcastle Art Gallery will add 1,600 square metres of exhibition space, enabling the institution to display its permanent collection for the first time since opening in 1977. The collection has grown by over 500 percent during this period, now comprising over 7,000 works valued at \$145 million.

Beyond the Mordant gift, the expansion will feature major new commissions including two groundbreaking sculptures by internationally renowned artist Fayen d'Evie, a four-metre suspended sculpture of 30 cast aluminium fish by seventh-generation Novocastrian and Awabakal descendant Shellie Smith, and a large-scale window commission by Newcastle-based artist Maggie Hensel-Brown.

First Nations culture will be prominently featured with the acquisition of **Kinyingarra Guwinyanba (Off Country)**(2022) by internationally acclaimed Quandamooka artist Megan Cope. The work comprises 44 poles adorned with rock oyster shells, suspended within the gallery's new central atrium.

The expanded Newcastle Art Gallery will offer visitors a first look at the new spaces from September 26, coinciding with the launch of the New Annual Festival. The major exhibition **Iconic Loved Unexpected** will open in early 2026, presenting national icons, beloved favourites and unexpected discoveries from the collection across multiple media.

This generous gift from the Mordant family not only enriches Newcastle Art Gallery's already distinguished collection but also demonstrates the power of private philanthropy in supporting public cultural institutions. As the gallery prepares to unveil its expanded facilities, the Mordant donation ensures that visitors will encounter works of exceptional quality and significance in the reimagined space.

*This article was posted 2 July 2022.*

*Image: Image L-R: Newcastle Art Gallery Director Laretta Morton OAM, Catriona Mordant AM and Simon Mordant AO. Credit Max Mason-Hubers.*

**LINK - <https://artcollector.net.au/major-gift-strengthens-newcastle-art-galleryys-collection-ahead-of-expansion/>**