

National Gallery of Art

Sixth Street and Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, DC
Mailing address: 2000 South Club Drive, Landover, MD 20785
T: 202.842.6353 | pressinfo@nga.gov | nga.gov/press

Department of Communications

CONTACT:

Laurie Tylec
Publicist
(202) 842-6355
l-tylec@nga.gov

Resnicow + Associates
(212) 671-5150
nationalgallery@resnicow.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
September 19, 2024

For more information, visit
www.nga.gov/press
www.ngv.vic.gov.au

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON, AND NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA, COLLABORATE ON GLOBAL CULTURAL EXCHANGE

**Collaboration will launch with largest-ever international exhibition of Indigenous
Australian art premiering in Washington in 2025**

Exhibition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art will tour North America 2025–2027

Washington, DC—Today, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) in Australia announce a cultural partnership that will facilitate the global exchange of key works from the permanent collections of both leading arts institutions. This collaborative effort creates new opportunities for global audiences to experience defining works of art that reflect these respective cultures.

The exchange will begin with the largest exhibition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art ever presented internationally. ***The Stars We Do Not See: Australian Indigenous Art*** will premiere on October 18, 2025, at the National Gallery of Art in Washington and subsequently travel to the Denver Art Museum in Colorado, the Portland Art Museum in Oregon, the Peabody Essex Museum in Massachusetts, and the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada.

Curated by the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) especially for North American audiences and drawn exclusively from their world-leading collection in Melbourne, the exhibition features over 200 works by more than 130 artists. Through a rich display of iconic masterpieces, including many that have never before left Australia, ***The Stars We Do Not See*** charts watershed moments in Indigenous art from the late 19th century to the present, revealing a rich history of creativity that predates the arrival of the British.

In 2027, the National Gallery of Art will send an exhibition of major works from its renowned collection of modern and contemporary American art to NGV.

“We are thrilled to collaborate with the National Gallery of Victoria in this cultural exchange, which will see our storied American art collection reaching audiences on the other side of the world. We are very pleased to be able to bring these important Indigenous Australian artworks to US audiences, many for the very first time,” said **Kaywin Feldman, director of the National Gallery of Art**. “This exhibition exchange has been a joyful collaboration with the staff at the NGV and our North American partners. We are all deeply grateful for the generous loans of so many masterpieces from the NGV collection.”

—more—

The Stars We Do Not See...2-2-2

“Many of the works traveling are globally recognized as undisputed masterpieces—with many visitors traveling to the NGV in Melbourne just to see these iconic examples of Indigenous Australian art. Never before has a volume of works of this size and national significance toured internationally, making this a truly rare opportunity for North American audiences to experience and appreciate these globally important works up close,” said **Tony Ellwood AM, director of the National Gallery of Victoria**. “One of the core roles of the NGV as a public institution is to share Australian arts and culture with as many people as possible. We are delighted to be partnering with our North American colleagues to share the work and stories of these important Australian First Nation artists with the world.”

The Stars We Do Not See introduces audiences to customary forms and styles in Indigenous Australian art, including the conceptual map paintings of the Central and Western Deserts (sometimes colloquially referred to as “dot paintings”), ochre bark paintings, cultural objects, and ambitious experimental weavings, as well as the work of new-media artists who both challenge and build upon tradition with groundbreaking works in neon, video, photography, sound, and much more.

Highlighting the diverse and distinct visual iconographies of Indigenous Australia, which is made up of more than 250 Indigenous nations, the works featured span the Australian continent, including the Tiwi Islands, Arnhem Land, Far North Queensland, the Torres Strait, the Central Desert, Southwestern Australia, the Kimberley, the Southeast, and more.

Highlight works never before seen in North America include Emily Kam Kngwarray’s magnum opus and largest painting, *Anwerlarr Anganenty (Big Yam Dreaming)* (1995). This icon of the NGV collection measures over nine by twenty-seven feet and represents the underground network of roots and yams. This immense canvas, drawn in a single, continuous line, highlights the gesture and spontaneity for which Kngwarray’s body of work is globally renowned.

The exhibition’s title, ***The Stars We Do Not See***, is inspired in part by the late senior Yolŋu artist Gulumbu Yunupingu (1943–2012), who, after her passing, became known as “Star Lady” for her extensive paintings of the night sky. Yunupingu’s intricate works, a selection of which will be featured in the exhibition, use crosses to represent the stars we can see and a dense network of dots to symbolize the stars we cannot see—the unseen expanse of the universe. The Yolŋu people live in Arnhem Land, with Star Lady coming from a community in the northeast known as Yirrkala. Arnhem Land is a region at the top of the Northern Territory that is internationally known for its artists’ daring work on bark.

Urban-based contemporary artists working in new media are represented throughout the show, with key works by influential artists such as Brook Andrew, Richard Bell, Reko Rennie, Ricky Maynard, Maree Clarke, and Lorraine Connelly-Northey. Highlights include Christian Thompson’s *Burdi Burdi (Fire Fire)* (2021), a four-channel sound installation that explores the loss of First Nations languages, as well as Destiny Deacon’s *Snow Storm* (2005), in which found Black ragdolls have been placed inside a clear Perspex cube filled with polystyrene balls. The work draws a connection between the concept of “the white cube” and the way Aboriginal material culture has historically been presented in a clinical, museological environment.

The Hon. Jacinta Allan, Premier of the Australian State of Victoria, said, “We are proud to support this exhibition which celebrates the rich histories and cultures of Victoria’s First Peoples, honoring the oldest living culture in history and sharing their stories with people from across the country and the globe.”

–more–

The Stars We Do Not See...3-3-3

“It is impossible for any exhibition to fully capture the diversity and complexity of Australian Indigenous art. Since long before the invention of the written word, First Nations people have transmitted important cultural knowledge through a combination of art, song, dance, and story,” said **Myles Russell-Cook, senior curator of Australian and First Nations art at the National Gallery of Victoria**. “These works represent 65,000 years of culture, sharing the unique and special qualities of First Peoples art in Australia with the world. Both the book and the exhibition represent a significant community effort, which I hope will foster greater connection and understanding of First Peoples culture and art.”

EXHIBITION ORGANIZATION

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Victoria and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with the Denver Art Museum, the Portland Art Museum, the Peabody Essex Museum, and the Royal Ontario Museum.

Bank of America is the North America Tour Sponsor for the exhibition.

EXHIBITION TOUR

National Gallery of Art, Washington, October 18, 2025–March 1, 2026
Denver Art Museum, Colorado, April 19–July 26, 2026
Portland Art Museum, Oregon, September 2026–January 2027
Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts, February–June 2027
Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, July 2027–January 2028

EXHIBITION CURATOR

The exhibition is curated by Myles Russell-Cook, senior curator of Australian and First Nations art, National Gallery of Victoria. At the National Gallery of Art, *The Stars We Do Not See* is being coordinated by E. Carmen Ramos, chief curatorial and conservation officer, and Lynn Matheny, deputy head and associate curator of interpretation.

EXHIBITION PUBLICATION

The exhibition is accompanied by a major new book published by the National Gallery of Victoria and the National Gallery of Art, in association with D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers. Richly illustrated with more than 100 individual artwork plates by First Nations Australian artists, the volume features over 30 contributing authors and all-new writing on artists and works in the exhibition, including an essay on the history of Indigenous art in Australia by exhibition curator Myles Russell-Cook.

###