

AGSA

UNDER EMBARGO – FOR RELEASE THURSDAY 23 NOVEMBER

AUSTRALIAN FIRST: AGSA acquires celebrated and influential British artist Chris Ofili painting, *The Swing*



In an Australian first, the Art Gallery of South Australia today unveils a major new acquisition, a painting titled *The Swing*, 2020-23, by one of the most renowned and influential living British painters Chris Ofili thanks to the generosity of the visionary cultural philanthropists James and Diana Ramsay.

All works of art that enter AGSA's collection are 100% supported via philanthropy, gifts, or fundraising. Made possible through the James and Diana Ramsay Fund, this acquisition exemplifies the extraordinary power of private generosity, and is a gift to all South Australians and our visitors.

This ambitious acquisition dramatically expands the Gallery's holdings of Ofili's work given that it was already the first public gallery in Australia to acquire the artist's work in 2008 with a suite of prints, entitled *Black Kiss*, 2006. AGSA Director, Rhana Devenport ONZM, is passionate that AGSA is leading the way in amplifying the voices of exceptional artists such as Ofili. She says, 'We are honoured that AGSA is the first public gallery in the country to be able to secure a major painting by Ofili, a sensational work that speaks so vividly and powerfully to our British, European and First Nations art collection. Ofili's career rose to prominence in 1998 when he became the winner of the coveted Turner prize, he was further honoured when he represented Britain at the Biennale Arte in Venice in 2003 and his work is currently on view with a vast site-specific painting installation, *Requiem*, at Tate Britain.'

'As for our beloved *Circe Invidiosa*, 1892, by JW Waterhouse, which is on display nearby, this magnificent painting was acquired the year it was painted. Ofili's work is held in prominent collections internationally, including Tate, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; The British Museum, London; and The Museum of Modern Art, New York. We are thrilled that audiences across Australia and the globe will be able to visit AGSA to experience this incredible painting' she said.

The Swing is part of a major new series of paintings Ofili completed over six years in Trinidad entitled 'The Seven Deadly Sins', which premiered in London earlier this year.

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Kerry de Lorme, Executive Director, James and Diana Ramsay Foundation said 'Ofili's intricate and seductive work strengthens and develops AGSA's collection and exemplifies the ambition of James and Diana Ramsay to support major acquisitions that are transformative for the Gallery and its audiences of today and tomorrow.'

AGSA Curator, Contemporary Art, Leigh Robb says, 'Ofili's masterpiece is a study of lust and desire inspired by key moments in art and music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ofili has drawn on Mallarmé's poem *Afternoon of a Faun* (*L'Après-midi d'un faune*), and Jean-Honoré Fragonard's 1767 French Rococo painting, *The Swing*. He is also influenced by the Caribbean foliage and quality of light where he lives and works.'

Although the time of day is uncertain, this painting is saturated by summertime fertility: pollen-like motes, surrounded by aureoles as though caught in sunlight, float across its surface, filling the air. Flower eaters, figures that recur across this body of work, populate the landscape with molecules and flowers that spout from their mouths.

A female figure swings in an attitude of lazy abandon, while a satyr lounges in the pink foreground. Partly inspired by Mallarmé's symbolist poem *The Afternoon of a Faun*, in which the central character reflects on his visions of a pair of nymphs, these two figures aren't necessarily of the same spatio-

temporal plane. While the satyr is earth-bound, connected to the flowers that his looping tail resembles, the vaporous nymph almost dissolves into and out of the air through which she moves.

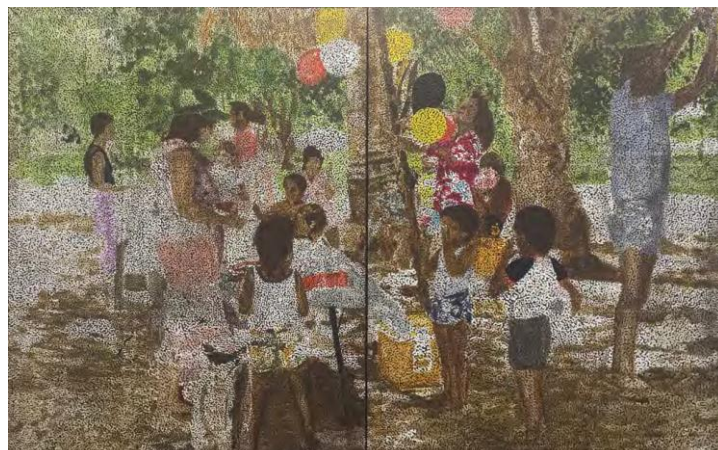
A defining aspect of Ofili's intricate paintings is a dreamlike dance between abstraction and figuration, opacity and translucency and *The Swing* is a signature example.' said Robb.

The Guardian's review by Adrian Searle described the work as, 'Full of giddy detail and unfathomable mystery, these large, luxurious and deeply complex paintings are among the most beguiling works the artist has ever made'.

Ofili's work became the wellspring for a new collection display entitled *Metamorphosis*, presented from 23 November in the Melrose Wing. The display includes three significant acquisitions also made possible through the James and Diana Ramsay Fund. Featuring over 40 works from across AGSA's collection many of which have never been seen before, *Metamorphosis* looks at themes of transformation and change in nature, the body and the spirit.

Associated works include *Untitled (TBOMB)*, 2020, by Daniel Boyd an Australian Aboriginal (Kudjla/Gangalu) artist of international repute. This is a monumental diptych painting from a series titled *Sandpiper Dance*, created while the artist spent a year on his mother's family's country overlooking Trinity Bay, south of Cairns.

The surface of this painting is mesmerising, Boyd uses a technique of dotting the canvas with transparent glue which he then paints over, creating a layered lens type effect. He uses the dots as a reference to the cultural lens through which people may see the world, and the fact that all individuals possess their own distinct points of view. The effect of this technique is also a nod to the great masters of impressionism and pointillism

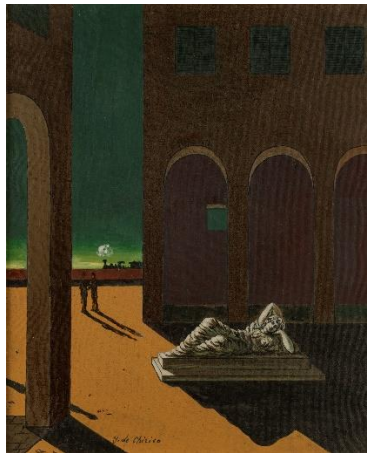


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The painting is presented in conversation with Camille Pissarro's *Meadow at Éragny (Prairie à Éragny)*, 1886. Camille Pissarro is one of the great masters of the French Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist movements. His paintings are celebrated for the sensation of air, light and transparency they generate through his careful chromatic analysis.



Giorgio de Chirico's *Italian Square (Piazza d'Italia)*, a superb example of the artist's own artistic invention Metaphysical Art, transcends and transforms the physical landscape. This painting, depicting Turin's Piazza d'Italia, is a paradoxical exploration of space and architecture which is simultaneously real and uncanny.



Metamorphosis is open from 23 November in the Melrose Wing, Ofili's *The Swing* is the centrepiece along with much loved works including full names Waterhouse Pissarro, Henri Fantin-Latour and Giorgio de Chirico, Michael Zavros alongside new contemporary works of art and design. Plan your next visit to the gallery to experience a new perspective on the world.

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IMAGES <http://agsa.sa.gov.au/media/2024programandacquisitions>

[The Guardian Review](#)

Image captions:

Chris Ofili born Manchester, Britain 1968, *The Swing* 2020-2023, oil and charcoal on linen 310.0 x 200.0 cm © Chris Ofili, courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro

Photo: Jack Hems *The Swing* acquired by the generosity of the James and Diana Ramsay Fund 2023 for the Art Gallery of South Australia.

Giorgio De Chirico born Volos, Greece 1888 died Rome 1979 Italian square (Piazza d'Italia) 1951, Rome oil on canvas 50.0 x 40.0 cm James and Diana Ramsay Fund 2022 Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide © Estate of Giorgio de Chirico/SIAE. Copyright Agency

Camille Pissarro born Charlotte Amalie, St Thomas, Danish Virgin Islands 1830 died Paris 1903 Meadow at Éragny (Prairie à Éragny) 1886, Éragny, France oil on canvas 59.4 x 73.0 cm Gift of the Gwinnett Family, James and Diana Ramsay Foundation, Roy and Marjory Edwards Bequest Fund, Margaret Olley Art Trust, Helen Bowden, Frank and Mary Choate, Peter and Pamela McKee, Emeritus Professor Anne Edwards AO, David and Pam McKee, and Members through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation Masterwork Appeal 2014. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

Daniel Boyd Kudjila/Gangalu people, Queensland born Cairns, Queensland 1982 Untitled (TBOMB) 2020, Sydney oil, synthetic polymer paint and archival glue on canvas 244.5 x 396.0 x 3.5 cm (overall) James and Diana Ramsay Fund 2020 Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide © Daniel Boyd 20202P3(a&b)



The James and Diana Ramsay Fund

The James and Diana Ramsay Fund is the Art Gallery of South Australia's most visionary fund for the development of its collection; it is bestowed by James Stewart Ramsay AO (1923–1996) and Diana May Ramsay AO (1926–2017). Their names are synonymous with arts patronage in South Australia, and indeed Australia. Since 1972, their gifts of art have deeply enriched the Gallery's collection.

Together they have supported South Australia and its future with great passion, dedication and purpose. Their gift of profound generosity to AGSA is dedicated to the acquisition of major works of art. As a powerful momentum for collection excellence, the Fund will ensure that the AGSA collection expands its national and international prominence. The culmination of these generous dual bequests provide a potent avenue to significantly grow the collection and directly benefit all South Australians.

These bequests build on the Ramsay's long, heartfelt and fruitful relationship with the Gallery. James and Diana's donations have made a dramatic impact on the Gallery's collections of Australian, Asian and International art. Since 1969 their generosity has assisted the Gallery in countless ways, particularly in acquiring or donating 100 works of art for the collection.

The James and Diana Ramsay Foundation has further supported AGSA's innovative public programs, including Start at the Gallery, for young people and their families, and The Studio, a space for experimentation and creative making. Importantly, the James and Diana Ramsay Foundation also provided the vision and support in perpetuity for the \$100,000 Ramsay Art Prize, one of Australia's most generous and dynamic art prizes for Australian artists under the age of 40.