

# AGSA

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
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## **Vale M.J.M Carter AO (1926–2024)**

### **A lifetime of giving**

*I believe there is a great joy in seeing a work of art in an art gallery given by oneself, or indeed by others. It has become the most fulfilling area of my life, assisting to enhance the collection for the public to enjoy.*

**Max Carter**



The Art Gallery of South Australia mourns the loss of one of this nation's most significant philanthropists to the arts, M.J.M. Carter AO. His generosity to AGSA and to the arts began in 1966 and continued passionately throughout his life. Max was committed to expanding the scope and quality of the Gallery's collections.

He was dedicated to sharing its remarkable stories with the people of South Australia and beyond and aspired to ensure his home state remained at the forefront of cultural engagement and excellence.

Today, the Gallery's collections are a testament to the potent and transformative power one individual can have on art and society.

Today AGSA Director Rhana Devenport ONZM paid tribute to Max Carter:

'The Art Gallery of South Australia expresses its heartfelt condolences on the passing of the outstanding South Australian philanthropist M.J.M. Carter AO (1926–2024).

Max's boundless enthusiasm, passion and energy, love of the arts and the Gallery will forever be remembered. His life's mission of significant philanthropy, the unparalleled impact of his giving to AGSA, and the way his quiet example motivated and inspired so many others were immeasurably transformative.

Max is one of AGSA's most influential and passionate individual benefactors and he leaves an exceptional legacy. Our AGSA family – past and present – are immensely saddened by this loss.

It has been a tremendous privilege for AGSA staff to work so closely with Max in many capacities over seven decades – as an art lover, benefactor, an inspired collector, and a great friend. Max will be remembered for his incredible legacy and contribution to all South Australians and all visitors to AGSA.'

At the age of eleven Max made his first visit to the Art Gallery of South Australia. He was transfixed by the paintings on display and, while his life took him around the world – influencing his interests in art along the way – his loyalty remained with the Gallery.

He made a recent and significant contribution to support the ambitious AGSA 500 publication, a landmark publication that celebrates 500 key works of art in the state's collection. AGSA's collection of more than 47,000 works of art is one of the most remarkable in Australia, forged through strategic vision, artistic and political will, astute connoisseurship and purposeful philanthropic support. The book includes key examples from the M.J.M. Carter AO collection.

To date works of art in the AGSA collection made possible through the generosity of M.J.M. Carter total more than 1400 and have a collective estimated value of \$42 million.

Max's long and fruitful relationship with the Gallery encompassed diverse artistic interests. From the outset an enthusiastic donor to AGSA's Asian Art collection, Max made his first donation to this collection in 1967. His travel to Japan and India profoundly shaped his view of the world and his interest in the myriad arts and cultures of Asia. His lifelong passion for Chinese porcelain, Japanese netsuke, Indian and Southeast Asian art is reflected in the quality of the AGSA collection, with his additions informed by international trends and the scholarship of the time. Many of the works included in the Asian art collection have appeared in catalogues and exhibitions and at times have reshaped our understanding or provided new insights in the field.

In 2014 the donation of his netsuke collection was celebrated in the catalogue *Netsuke and other miniatures*. Over the past decade his generous contributions offered the opportunity to acquire unique masterpieces for the Islamic and Japanese collections. These include the extraordinary Indian miniature *Akbar Enthroned* created in c.1595–1600 and more recently the ethereal *Mountain landscape*, painted by Yukawa Sanshū in c.1930.

His benefaction had the greatest impact on the Australian art collection, transforming it into one of international significance. A modest first donation in 1968 of a Tasmanian colonial still life by W.B. Gould, *Still life with strawberries*, 1851, led to an astounding 200 gifts over the following decades. Each new offering was of exceptional rarity and quality and led to the formation of the nation's finest and most balanced nineteenth-century Australian art collection of any state art museum.

Max's support was timely, strategic and visionary and among many of his donations are some the most cherished images in Australian art. Martha Berkeley's *Georgina, Emily and Augusta Rose*, c.1848, demonstrates his early recognition of the role of women artists. A large number of his gifts are cornerstones of the collection and are on permanent display.

The name Max Carter is synonymous with a visit to the Gallery's Elder Wing of Australian Art, where gallery 1 is named in his honour.

In 1993 AGSA celebrated Max's support and love of Australian art with the exhibition and book, *The M.J.M. Carter Collection: A Private View of Australian Art*. In 2006, to celebrate his eightieth birthday and his fortieth year of giving, the Gallery staged a tribute exhibition, *M.J.M. Carter Collection: The Joy of Giving*, which showcased the highlights of his many gifts. To mark his ninetieth year in 2016, Max Carter gave six paintings to the Gallery, including Charles Conder's masterpiece, *Hayfield, Giverny, France, 1894*.

Max was awarded the Order of Australia for his charitable works in 1985. In total he spent 18 years on the Art Gallery Board – second only in longevity to Sir Hans Heysen. In 1981 Max became a founding member of the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation, and between 1999 and 2002 was its Chairman and remains its longest-standing Deputy Chair.

His legacy as one of Australia's longest-lived and most prolific benefactors is literally written on walls throughout the Art Gallery of South Australia. A selection of his most recent gifts is currently on display in *Misty Mountain Shining Moon: Japanese Landscapes envisioned*.

Max's legacy and contribution to the arts will be forever remembered, as AGSA's Director and staff confirm:

'It is with great sorrow that the Art Gallery Board notes the passing of Max Carter AO, a passionate and dedicated philanthropist whose legacy will be enjoyed by audiences well into the future. Max's generosity has inspired countless supporters and has benefitted the State of South Australia immeasurably.'

- Sandy Verschoor, Chair, Art Gallery Board

'We are deeply saddened to learn of Max Carter's passing. He was totally committed to AGSA and the Foundation. His contribution to the Gallery and the people of South Australia will endure through the ages.'

- Andrew Gwinnett, Chair, Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation, and Hiroko Gwinnett

'Max's life was a life well lived. His great belief in the magic and transformative power of art has informed his seven-decade-long friendship with the Gallery and his legacy will continue to inspire and resonate with our visitors every day here at AGSA. Max recognised the importance of giving and for that, we will be forever grateful.'

- Rhana Devenport, Director

'He is one of those special people who come along once in a generation and leave an indelible mark in the art world. He was in a sense a renaissance man. Armed with a sharp eye and an uncanny prescience, he collected and rescued works no one really wanted or appreciated at the time. Before many others, he understood the extraordinary value of our visual cultural history and how records of our past allow us to better understand our place within the world.'

- Tracey Lock, Curator of Australian Art

'M.J.M. Carter's early recognition of the importance and beauty of Asian art enriched the collection at AGSA. His enduring enthusiasm for Asian art is represented in major Gallery catalogues and exhibitions, enabling a wealth of opportunities for scholars from around the world to engage with the collection. Ultimately, his contributions to the collection speak to his curiosity about other cultures and his understanding of the

important role that art can play in creating a bridge between us and our nearest neighbours.'

- Russell Kelty, Curator of Asian Art

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### **Michael John Maxwell Carter**

Max Carter's ability to support a range of organisations was the result of the success of the family business, Austral Steel. He was involved in the Roy Carter Foundation, named after his father and Austral Steel's founder, which supported Legacy, the Crippled Children's Association, Helping Hand Inc., and also helped to establish Westminster School.

Since 1967 Max's most significant commitment has been to the Art Gallery of South Australia through the donation of art for the M.J.M. Carter Collection of nineteenth-century art.

In 1968 he began eighteen years of service (over two periods) on the Art Gallery Board, followed by a position on the Council of the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation. Max Carter was made an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for his commitment to the arts, particularly through the Art Gallery of South Australia, in 1985. The M.J.M. Carter Gallery was named in his honour in 1992.

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**IMAGES**                    <https://agsa.sa.gov.au/media/valemjmcarter>

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### **Header image credit:**

M.J.M Carter at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, photo: Saul Steed