

# AGSA

MEDIA RELEASE – Embargoed until Monday 29 January

## AGSA 500

### A Story of excellence, generosity and beauty



**Adelaide, Australia:** The Art Gallery of South Australia today unveils the *AGSA 500* publication, a landmark book that celebrates 500 key works of art in the state's collection.

Owned by the people of South Australia, the Art Gallery of South Australia collection is a collective marvel. Established in 1881 and nourished through great ambition, care and generosity, the AGSA collection is today one of the largest and most significant in Australia.

This new publication, and many of the acquisitions it highlights, has been made possible through the generosity of the late M.J.M Carter AO, who passed away in January 2024. Max as he was known, gave generously to help grow the collection over many decades. He was dedicated to sharing AGSA's collection's 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 that individuals can have on art and society.

*AGSA 500* highlights a selection of this remarkable collection. Arranged broadly within three groupings – Australian, Asian and International art – and spans the Gallery's seven curatorial areas: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art; Asian Art; Australian Art; Contemporary Art; Decorative Arts and Design; International Art; and Prints, Drawings and Photographs. The five hundred works of art are presented in reverse chronology – time-travelling from the present to the past. This approach brings to light the dynamic embrace of diverse art forms, an embrace that has existed since the Gallery's inception. Importantly, the works of art have been carefully chosen by AGSA's Directorate and curators for their relevance, and their ability to act as touchstones to myriad ideas.

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Highlights include:

- The more than six metre long painting *Kangkura-KangkuraKu Tjukurpa – A Sister's Story* 2017. Depicting the ancestral bond between sisters, this collaborative work was made by the Ken family and is a leading work in AGSA's national Tarnanthi touring project, Kungka Kunpu (strong women)
- Clarice Beckett, regarded as one of Australia's most remarkable twentieth-century painters, who is celebrated for her distinctively 'misty' paintings. *AGSA 500* features Beckett's *October morning* 1927.
- Work by the late and highly respected South Australian designer Khai Liew from the 2010 *Collect+ors* series, made in collaboration with Bruce Nuske.
- A pair of six-panel Japanese screens detailing battle scenes from 'The Tale of the Heike' (Heike Monogatari), from 1700–25.
- Lindy Lee's, *The Life of Stars*, takes pride of place on North Terrace outside AGSA. A mirrored beacon, *The Life of Stars* which is six metres in height is the culmination of decades of experimentation and represents a breakthrough in Lee's artistic oeuvre.
- Glass artist, Clare Belfrage's tableau of nine works dating between 2007 and 2017, that demonstrates Belfrage's growth and sophistication in the application of drawn-line work in layers using fine glass threads, known as stringers.
- Donald Judd's *-Untitled*, 1974–75, a rare 'topographic' sculpture created in response to the terrain of the Gallery's courtyard. This permanent site-specific sculpture was controversial at its inception and was the first triangular piece the artist produced and the only extant public sculpture by the artist in the Southern Hemisphere.
- *Brooklands*, 1929 by British artist Claude Flight. This linocut captures the energy and excitement of living in a new area. The bold abstract shapes, repetitive forms and bright colours were a dramatic departure from the monochromatic prints created by artists before the First World War.

Minister for Arts Andrea Michaels MP says, 'Great collections like AGSA's are to be shared, cared for and enjoyed over generations. Regular visitors to the Gallery can experience the breadth and depth of the collection through the Gallery's thoughtful, animated and ever-evolving displays. Now, through *AGSA 500* the collection can find its way into the homes and hearts of art lovers the world over'.

Rhana Devenport ONZM, the 11<sup>th</sup> Director, of AGSA, says, 'The works of art selected for this publication represent just one percent of the entire AGSA collection. This spirited compilation, nonetheless, harnesses the liveliness, rigour, beauty, intellectual force and expressive power of an exceptional collection, one that will continue to inspire long into the future.'

'In addition to the informative narratives that accompany each of the 500 works are the stories of the individuals who made it all possible. The contributions of the Gallery's early initiators and curators, and its eleven directors since 1934 – alongside the vision and support of advisors, Art Gallery Board members, donors, exhibition-makers, politicians and, most importantly, artists.' She said.

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AGSA's collection of more than 47,000 works of art is a testament to the extraordinary generosity of individuals. For more than a decade now the collection has been entirely reliant on private giving and collecting groups for its growth.

Devenport says, 'AGSA warmly thanks Max Carter, AO, whose great belief in the magic and transformative power of art has informed his seven-decade-long friendship with the Gallery. Max understood that to give is more powerful than to receive.'

Among the first works featured in *AGSA 500* is an extraordinary pair of six-panel screens in ink pigments and gold on paper by Takaya Koho a recent gift from Max currently on display in *Misty Mountain, Shining Moon*.

*AGSA 500* will be launched at 6 pm on February 2 as part of First Friday and can be purchased from the AGSA gift shop or online [agsa.sa.gov.au](http://agsa.sa.gov.au)



## **Michael John Maxwell Carter**

Max Carter's ability to support a range of organisations was made possible through 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, Crippled Children's Association, Helping Hand Inc, and helped to establish Westminster School.

Since 1967 Maxwell'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 as well as many contributions of Japanese and Asian art.

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In 1968 he began 18 years service (over two periods) on the Gallery's Board, followed by positions on the council of the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation until 2024. 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. Max Carter passed away on 18 January 2024, aged 97.

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**IMAGES** <https://agsa.sa.gov.au/media/agsa500>

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## **Header image credit:**

Takaya Koho, born Japan c.1870, died Japan c.1920, Untitled, Thunder God after Ogata Kōrin (1658–1716) and Tawara Sōtatsu (c.1570–c.1640), 1892 (Meiji 25), Kyoto, Japan, pair of six panel screens, ink and pigments on gold and paper, 175.0 x 376.0 cm (each); M.J.M. Carter AO Collection through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2022