

ALBERTINA: Generous Donation of Indigenous Australian Art

The ALBERTINA Museum in Vienna has received a valuable donation from the Bähr/Frost Collection: 80 works of contemporary Indigenous Australian art will enrich the museum's holdings and open up new perspectives for exhibiting Australian art. The generous donation from the collectors Elisabeth Bähr and Lindsay Frost from Speyer (Germany), includes artworks by renowned Indigenous artists represented in all major Australian art museums. Additional works from their collection will be made available on loan and will also become part of the ALBERTINA Museum's holdings at a later date.

Klaus Albrecht Schröder, General Director of the ALBERTINA Museum, recognises the donation as a significant step towards diversifying the collection: 'As I bid farewell to my directorship, I am grateful to once again receive such an important donation to the ALBERTINA Museum. It directly follows on from important works in our collection, which are shown as unique objects in an art museum and not as artefacts in an ethnological museum. The newly added 80 works decisively strengthen the diversity of the collection - they were preceded in 2007 by a presentation on Aboriginal Art from the collection of Donald Kahn,' says Schröder.

'We are delighted that the ALBERTINA – one of Europe's leading art museums with a dynamic exhibition programme – will make this art form permanently accessible. The haptic quality and vibrant colours of the works reflect the diversity and depth of Indigenous Australian art and will enable the public to gain completely new insights,' say Elisabeth Bähr and Lindsay Frost.

Elisabeth Bähr and Lindsay Frost, living in Speyer, discovered contemporary Indigenous Australian art for themselves over 35 years ago: 'We travelled tens of thousands of kilometres on outback roads to collect it, researched it, promoted public exhibitions and wrote and lectured about it. We are delighted that with this donation and its own holdings, the ALBERTINA will enable Viennese and European citizens to gain a deeper insight into this non-European contemporary art,' says Lindsay Frost.

Collecting beyond art-historical canon

Klaus Albrecht Schröder, Director General of the ALBERTINA Museum, sees the donation as a significant step in the diversification of the collection: 'Indigenous Australian art provides a unique insight into an innovative art movement that has so far been barely represented in Europe. This impressive donation emphasises much more than just the global reach of the ALBERTINA Museum: With this gift, we are redefining the art canon as a whole, beyond existing boundaries. Looking beyond the eurocentric and male dominated gaze is an invaluable enrichment for our overall understanding of contemporary art.'

Elisabeth Bähr, who ran an art gallery for a decade, adds: 'Special exhibitions like the one at the Gropius Bau in Berlin in 2023 or at Tate Modern in 2025 are exciting, but it is only by continuously coming into contact with new art forms that motifs and nuances can be fully grasped. Contemporary art is global: with the ALBERTINA Museum, Europe now has a renowned focal point for artworks from the beginnings of the contemporary Indigenous Australian art movement from the 1970s to the present – for research purposes, for its own exhibitions and for loans to other institutions.'

With this donation, the ALBERTINA Museum emphasises its leading role in making a globally significant art form accessible to European audiences across cultural boundaries and presenting Indigenous Australian art in the context of a European collection. The new acquisition follows Schröder's decades-long strategy of diversifying the collection and follows on from exhibitions such as 'The Beauty of Diversity' (2024) and 'Desert Dreaming' (2007) on Aboriginal Art.

Collecting and research

In 2022, Elisabeth Bähr and Dr Lindsay Frost wrote a 495-page book in German ('Erzählte Welt' ISBN 9783803040381) about contemporary Indigenous Australian art and in 2024 translated it into English as a free open-access document (download at <https://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/9068/>).

Their stated aim is to impart fundamental knowledge (aesthetics, topics, politics, trends, techniques and developments) about this innovative art movement, which is still outside the established art-historical canon in Europe, to the German-speaking art scene. They maintain an informative website at www.aboriginal-art.de.

The couple is currently conducting research on the exhibition theory and curatorial practice of contemporary Indigenous Australian art outside Australia.

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Elizabeth Nyumi Nungurrayi
Parwalla near Kiwirrkurra, 1998
Acrylic on canvas
120 x 80 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum Vienna – Bähr/Frost Collection



Shirley Purdie
Mabel Downs Country, 2001
Earth pigments on canvas
100 × 140 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum Vienna – Bähr/Frost Collection