Norman Lindsay is one of Australia’s most notorious and prolific artists. Born in Creswick, Victoria, in 1879, he was an illustrator, cartoonist, writer, sculptor and painter, famous equally for his classic children’s book *The magic pudding* (1918) as for his erotic depictions of the female nude. The controversial nature of his work earned him a larger-than-life reputation, yet Lindsay’s initial attempts to establish a serious collection of his works failed. After being rejected by several museums and galleries, in 1969 he decided to establish his Springwood (New South Wales) house as a gallery and museum, at the same time as donating a collection of twenty-seven works to the University of Melbourne. Lindsay described his decision at the time with a defiant tone typical of his artistic persona:

The national galleries of Australia don’t want me. I don’t want to make money. It’s no damn use to me, Australia has been good to me despite the fact that they wanted to hang me at one stage … I want to leave behind a definite statement of my work and this is the only way to do it.


**Reputation and controversy**

Many of Norman Lindsay’s major compositions from the mid-1920s revel in sexuality, spectacle and excess. Luscious figures collide in elaborate scenes such as *Crete* and *Out of the dark forest*, drawing on a variety of classical figures and mythological references, from Don Juan and Venus to pirates and amazons. The erotic nature of Lindsay’s depictions extended to his literary work, and among his thirteen published novels, at least one, *Redheap* (1930), was banned in Australia.

Lindsay had a rebellious nature – in his political views, his social perceptions and in his relationship with the art world. In contrast to contemporaries such as Margaret Preston, Roland Wakelin and Grace Cossington-Smith, who in the 1920s explored the refined and minimal aesthetics of Modernism, Lindsay chose abundant imagery laden with traditional stylistic references and classical forms. By challenging the predominant aesthetics of the time, it has been argued that Lindsay was reacting against the conservative and restrictive aspects of society at large, particularly in relation to sexuality and social perceptions of morality.