Celebrating 40 years since the establishment of a university art gallery at Parkville, this exhibition presents a selection of the best known and most important highlights of the University of Melbourne Art Collection. Formed largely through gift and donation since 1881, the collection has strengths in Australian colonial painting, antiquities, and material culture from around the world. The collection comprises exceptional works by Australian artists from the nineteenth century to the present day as well as important bodies of work by artists including Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack and Rupert Bunny. It is one of the great assets of Melbourne’s cultural life.

Since 1972, the University of Melbourne has supported an art gallery dedicated to innovative exhibitions, public programs, publications and events. During its history, the museum has presented over 450 exhibitions ranging from classical antiquities to contemporary international projects and important surveys of the work of Australian artists.

The university’s art museum commenced its life as the University Gallery in the present-day John Medley Building. In 1975 it moved to more permanent premises in the refurbished Old Physics Building, and from 1984 to 1997 exhibitions were also held in the Ian Potter Gallery in the Physics Annex. The Physics Annex was incorporated into the present purpose-built Ian Potter Museum of Art, which opened in 1998 assisted by a generous grant from the Ian Potter Foundation. Our multi award-winning building designed by Nonda Katsalidis incorporates two significant works of art, Napier Waller’s stained glass Leckie window (1935) and Christine O’Loughlin’s Cultural rubble (1993).

Today, the Ian Potter Museum of Art is Australia’s leading university art museum. The Potter links a collection of over 19,000 works of art and a curated program of contemporary and historical exhibitions with public discourse, research and teaching. We facilitate partnerships between artists, curators, academics, staff and students committed to inquiry and experimentation, delivering challenging and purposeful art and ideas to the broader community.