The Museum of Contemporary Art Australia unveils its 2017 program.

MCA Director Elizabeth Ann Macgregor OBE said: ‘In 2017, the MCA program presents works by exceptional Australian and international contemporary artists at all stages of their careers and in varied media. We look forward to vigorous discussion on contemporary issues and the opportunity to reach audiences beyond museum walls with external projects and partnerships.’

A highlight of the program includes the most comprehensive exhibition of Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist’s work ever to be staged in Australia as part of the annual Sydney International Art Series 2017–18, supported by the NSW Government through Destination NSW. Continuing into the new year is the Sydney exclusive retrospective by leading Japanese contemporary artist Tatsuo Miyajima, part of the Sydney International Art Series 2016–17.


A major exhibition partnership between three of Sydney’s premier cultural institutions including the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), Carriageworks and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA) opens its inaugural presentation from 30 March 2017. The MCA presentation of The National 2017: New Australian Art features artists from every state and territory at different stages of their careers.

The first solo presentation in the Southern Hemisphere of recent Marcel Duchamp Prize-winner Kader Attia will be presented at the MCA from 12 April. Other highlights include two solo exhibitions featuring the work of women artists Jenny Watson and Hilarie Mais. Opening on 23 August, Primavera 2017: Young Australian Artists will be guest-curated by Sophia Kouyoumdjian who has comprehensive experience in Western Sydney’s contemporary art community.

The MCA’s touring program will reach audiences regionally, nationally and internationally across 11 venues. Exhibitions include Being Tiwi, Energies: Haines & Hinterding, Louise Hearman and Primavera at 25: MCA Collection. The MCA Bella Commission Teena’s Bathtime by David Capra will also tour to Maitland Regional Art Gallery (NSW).

MCA will unveil a new Foyer Wall Commission by Khadim Ali and Caroline Rothwell’s Sculpture Terrace Commission Composer (2016) will continue to greet visitors to the MCA Cafe until late in the year.

In 2017, C3West will continue to work with the Blacktown Arts Centre and UrbanGrowth NSW at the Blacktown Native Institution — one of Australia’s most important historical sites.

On display in the MCA Collection Galleries is Today Tomorrow Yesterday. This presentation focuses on contemporary practices by Australian and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists with work by more than 40 artists from the 1960s to the present.

In May and November, a new program of ideas and discussion will be introduced to interrogate contemporary issues that matter. Conversation Starters responds directly to themes in MCA exhibitions, opening up space for more voices and embracing different opinions.
MCA Collection: Today Tomorrow Yesterday
Ongoing
Level 2 Collection Galleries, FREE ENTRY

Drawn entirely from the Museum’s Collection, Today Tomorrow Yesterday considers the impact of the past and the influence of history on artistic practice today. From contemporary interpretations of ancestral stories to the continuing effects of early to mid-twentieth century avant-garde art and theatre, each room presents a different perspective on the history of the present.

Curated by MCA Senior Curator Natasha Bullock, this presentation includes work by more than forty Australian artists from the 1960s to the present, recent acquisitions and a number of new commissions. The title, Today Tomorrow Yesterday, is an adaptation drawn from The Prophet, a book of 26 prose poetry essays by the Lebanese artist, philosopher and writer Kahlil Gibran. He wrote: ‘yesterday is but today’s memory, and tomorrow is today’s dream’.

On display in 2017 are works acquired by the MCA Foundation and from a Joint Acquisition Program for contemporary Australian art with MCA, Qantas and Tate, made possible through a $2.75 million corporate gift from the Qantas Foundation. This presentation includes the inaugural Artist Room, a six-monthly program showcasing the depth of the Museum’s holdings of a single artist’s practice. The program begins with paintings and sculptures by Melbourne artist Linda Marrinon. Another feature of Today Tomorrow Yesterday is a site-specific commission for the MCA’s former Maritime Services Boardroom. This heritage, wood-lined room with maritime iconography has been beautifully transformed by Melbourne artist Julia Gorman.

Curator: Natasha Bullock

Tatsuo Miyajima: Connect with Everything
Sydney International Art Series
3 November 2016 – 5 March 2017
Level 3 Galleries, Ticketed

One of Japan’s leading contemporary artists, Tatsuo Miyajima is known for his immersive and technologically-driven sculptures and installations. Curated by MCA Chief Curator Rachel Kent, this exhibition is a Sydney-exclusive and is the artist’s first major survey exhibition in the Southern Hemisphere.

Central to his practice are numerical counters that count from 1 to 9 repeatedly using light-emitting diodes (LEDs), then go dark momentarily. For Miyajima, the cyclical repetition of numbers, along with the shift from light to dark, reflect the importance of time. He draws inspiration from Buddhist philosophy, with its exploration of mortality and human cycles of death and renewal.

The artist has held numerous solo exhibitions in Japan, the United States and Europe over the past two decades. He has represented Japan at the Venice Biennale in 1999 with the vast installation Mega Death and more recently presented Arrow of Time (Unfinished Life), at The Met Breuer, New York.

Tatsuo Miyajima: Connect with Everything is part of the annual Sydney International Art Series supported by the NSW Government through Destination NSW.

Curator: Rachel Kent
Primavera at 25: MCA Collection
19 December 2016 – 19 March 2017
Level 1 Galleries, FREE ENTRY

Primavera at 25 celebrates the silver jubilee of the MCA's annual Primavera exhibition showcasing the work of young Australian artists, curated by MCA Assistant Curator Megan Robson.

An anniversary presents a moment for reflection, an opportunity in which to consider the past and contemplate the future. Taking this significant milestone as a departure point, Primavera at 25 brings together works by Primavera alumni artists that explore concepts of transformation, time and history.

A number of works in the exhibition, including artworks by Nell, Mikala Dwyer and Ross Manning, appear to transform in front of our eyes, spinning and turning, shimmering and sparkling, or shape shifting to create new forms.

Time is explored in artworks by Tim Silver and Emma White that mark set intervals or deliberately age. While artists including Simon Yates and Heather Douglas draw upon personal and social memories in their works.

Elsewhere artists such as Nick Mangan, Danie Mellor, Pedro Wonaemirri and Constanze Zikos consider our relationship to the past through works that employ motifs from the past, reflect on our cultural histories or reinterpret traditional designs using contemporary materials.

After its presentation at the MCA, Primavera at 25 will tour throughout the country.

Primavera was initiated in 1992 by Dr Edward Jackson AM, Mrs Cynthia Jackson AM and their family in memory of their daughter and sister Belinda, a talented jeweller who died at the age of 29.

Curator: Megan Robson

The National 2017: New Australian Art
31 March – 18 June 2017
Level 3 Galleries, FREE ENTRY

A major exhibition partnership between three of Sydney's premier cultural institutions, The National: New Australian Art is a six-year initiative presented at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), Carriageworks and the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA).

The latest ideas and forms in contemporary Australian art will be presented over three editions in 2017, 2019 and 2021.

The exhibitions will encompass new and recently commissioned works and a diverse range of media including painting, video, sculpture, installation, drawing and performance.

Curators for the 2017 edition of The National: New Australian Art are Anneke Jaspers, Curator Contemporary Art and Wayne Tunnicliffe, Head Curator Australian Art, Art Gallery of NSW; Lisa Havilah, Director and Nina Miall, Curator, Carriageworks; and Blair French, Director, Curatorial & Digital, MCA.

Full artist list announced 1 December 2016.

Curators: Anneke Jaspers & Wayne Tunnicliffe (AGNSW), Lisa Havilah & Nina Miall (Carriageworks), and Blair French (MCA)
Kader Attia
12 April – 30 July 2017
Level 1 Galleries, FREE ENTRY

This is the first solo presentation of the work of French-Algerian artist Kader Attia (born 1970) in the Southern Hemisphere. This major new exhibition encompasses over a decade of the artist’s practice, focussing on key installations which are contextualised by video and sculptural works.

Exploring ideas around cultural exchange, appropriation, and the tangled relationship between extra-Occidental cultures and the West in the wake of decolonisation, Attia articulates theories of ‘injury’, ‘repair’ and ‘reparation’ through his practice. These ideas are expressed through two- and three-dimensional works that juxtapose broken objects, including African masks with visible repairs, alongside Classical statuary and documentary imagery of World War 1 veterans with significant facial injury and surgical reconstruction.

Absence and the void are further themes within Attia’s practice. Ghost (2007) comprises an installation of empty aluminium-foil casts of kneeling women in prayer. In Asesinos! Asesinos! (2014) over 100 doors are split into halves and presented in a vast, upright formation of A-frames. They recall bodies in a crowd that surge forward in protest, a sensation enhanced by the work’s title (‘Murderers! Murderers!’) and the silent megaphones mounted on top of them.

Kader Attia was the recent recipient of the 2016 Prix Marcel Duchamp, France’s most prestigious art award. Central to his presentation at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris was the extraordinary 48-minute film Reflecting Memory (2016), which forms a highlight of the current exhibition. Exploring themes of injury, therapy and the ‘phantom limb’, it opens up ideas around trauma and its unseen repercussions, for both the individual and wider society.

The exhibition will be presented at the MCA Australia, Sydney from 12 April – 30 July, and the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, from 30 September – 26 November 2017.

Curator: Rachel Kent

Jenny Watson
5 July – 2 October 2017
Level 3 Galleries, FREE ENTRY

Jenny Watson is a leading Australian artist whose conceptual painting practice spans more than four decades. Curated by MCA Curator Anna Davis this survey exhibition features works from the late 1970s to the present, including examples of Watson’s early realist paintings and drawings, and a number of key series of works on fabric.

Inspired by both punk and feminism, Watson’s work uses distilled imagery and abbreviated text to create an intimate interior world. She has travelled widely since the 1970s and employs textiles collected on her travels as the surface for many of her paintings, which also often include collaged materials such as images from magazines, horse’s hair, ribbons, bows and sequins. Many of Watson’s works feature self-portraits and alter egos, a cast of longhaired women, horses, ballerinas, rock guitarists and cats, who enact life’s ongoing psychodramas.

Intertwining autobiography and fiction, her work incorporates a diary-like voice that is delivered with deadpan wit and seems to relay the everyday experiences, dreams and desires of a self-proclaimed suburban girl. The relationship between text and image is central to her work, which frequently includes a small panel of hand painted text that sits alongside a larger image, undercutting or changing its meaning.

Curator: Anna Davis
Hilarie Mais
23 August – 19 November 2017
Level 1 North Gallery, FREE ENTRY

Hilarie Mais was born in the UK and lives and works in Sydney. Her work is characterised by a deep interest in the grid and its expressive possibilities. She makes abstract constructions and paintings that merge the formal structure of the grid with an interest in more organic forms found in nature.

Mais has been making work since the 1970s, influenced in part by her interest in the history of abstraction – in particular mid-20th century English constructivism, as well as later American minimalism including the work of Agnes Martin.

Mais’s work brings together formal geometry with biological and cellular structures to generate subtle visual experiences that are broadened expressively through the highly personalised application of paint. As such, the apparent formality of her works is undercut by emotional truth and underpinned by an organic and intimate sensibility, whilst the handmade quality of the works functions to personalise, even ‘feminise’ abstraction.

This exhibition brings together and presents a range of key works by Hilarie Mais made over the last decade.

The exhibition is co-curated by Blair French, Director, Curatorial & Digital and Manya Sellers, Assistant Curator.

Curators: Blair French and Manya Sellers

Primavera 2017: Young Australian Artists
23 August – 19 November 2017
Level 1 South Gallery, FREE ENTRY

Primavera is the MCA’s annual exhibition of young Australian artists aged 35 years and under. Since 1992, the Primavera series has showcased the works of artists in the early stages of their career, many of whom have gone on to exhibit nationally and internationally. In 2017, Primavera celebrates its 26th edition and is guest-curated by Sophia Kouyoumdjian.

Sophia Kouyoumdjian has worked in the arts sector for over 15 years across directorial, curatorial and exhibition management roles. Currently the Coordinator, Parramatta Artist Studios and previously the Acting Director and Curator at Blacktown Arts Centre, Sophia has comprehensive experience in Western Sydney’s contemporary art community.

Primavera was initiated in 1992 by Dr Edward Jackson AM, Mrs Cynthia Jackson AM and their family in memory of their daughter and sister Belinda, a talented jeweller who died at the age of 29.

Guest Curator: Sophia Kouyoumdjian
Pipilotti Rist
Sydney International Art Series
1 November 2017 – 18 February 2018
Level 3 Galleries, Ticketed

This exhibition represents the most comprehensive exhibition of Pipilotti Rist’s work ever to be staged in Australia and is part of the annual Sydney International Art Series supported by the NSW Government through Destination NSW.

Over the past thirty years, Swiss artist Pipilotti Rist has achieved international renown as a pioneer of video art and multimedia installations. Her dazzling, large-scale installations incorporate video, sculpture and performance and often envelop viewers in vibrantly coloured projections of light and music to create sensual and immersive environments.

Curated by MCA Senior Curator Natasha Bullock, this major new retrospective will include key audio-video installations from the beginnings of Rist’s career to the present, as well as major video objects, exemplifying the broadness of her artistic practice and engagement with this medium.

Curator: Natasha Bullock

MCA Touring Program 2017

The MCA’s Touring Program has been inspiring audiences regionally, nationally and internationally for more than a decade by providing unique exhibitions and projects supported by a range of education resources and programs that significantly contribute to the critical debate about contemporary art and ideas.

Being Tiwi
Moree Plains Gallery (Moree, NSW): 10 February – 26 March 2017
Glasshouse Port Macquarie (Port Macquarie, NSW): 7 July – 3 September 2017
Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery (Crawley, WA): 7 October – 16 December 2017

Energies: Haines & Hinterding
Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu (Christchurch, New Zealand): 25 November 2016 – 5 March 2017

Teena’s Bathtime
– MCA Bella Room Commission 2015
Maitland Regional Art Gallery (Maitland, NSW): 4 February 2017 – 28 May 2017

Louise Hearman
TarraWarra Museum of Art (Tarrawarra, VIC): 18 February – 14 May 2017
QUT Art Museum (Brisbane, QLD): 3 June 2017 – 6 August 2017

Primavera at 25: MCA Collection
Murray Art Museum Albury (Albury, NSW): 28 April – 25 June 2017
Gold Coast Art Centre (Surfers Paradise, QLD): 14 July – 3 September 2017

Touring Manager: Shinae Stowe
Conversation Starters
– A new program of art & ideas
FREE, some events ticketed
Throughout the MCA

Get comfortable with the uncomfortable.

In 2017, the MCA will host two weekends in May and November investigating contemporary issues that matter. What do they mean? Why are they urgent? Responding directly to themes and ideas in MCA exhibitions, the program places contemporary art at the heart of each conversation.

Artists and instigators will lead the way into the realm of the unexpected.

This program is designed to encourage audiences to step outside of comfort zones, open up conversation and make room for more voices. It will test how and when we learn while reworking the role of presenter and the audience.

Saturday 27 – Frist weekend of June 2017
Conversation Starters #1: Difference, displacement & belonging
Inspired by the work of Kader Attia

Public Engagement Manager: Yael Filipovic

Image courtesy Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, photograph: Jack Toohey