



Clockwise from far left: *Hairy Lady* tea towel by Camilla Engman at Third Drawer Down; Sophie Gannon Gallery; Karen Woodbury Gallery stockroom; detail of work at Sophie Gannon; *Go Wash Your Hands* soap by Marie Gardeski at Third Drawer Down; Centre for Contemporary Photography; a Martin Smith at Sophie Gannon

GALLERY SLAVES

Stencil art, cheeky photography, indigenous masters and artisan chic – make a Melbourne winter welcome with an art gallery crawl.

WORDS KENDALL HILL PHOTOGRAPHY ROBYN LEA

EVER SINCE FRED McCUBBIN and Tom Roberts set up their easels in the 19th-century bush at Box Hill, Melbourne has been the axis of Australia's art world. The birthplace of Australian impressionism has evolved into a city where art is integral to its fabric and where any spare surface can be a blank canvas. Little wonder it's now renowned for kaleidoscopic stencil art – British artist Banksy calls Melbourne “the continent's hothouse of creativity and wilful individualism”. There is even an annual festival celebrating creativity on the streets (www.stencilfestival.com).

The city's landmark public art programs funnel millions of dollars into permanent and temporary commissions each year, ensuring visitors are constantly inspired by new works. Wander the CBD alleyways to discover evolving installations, or visit the packed gallery precinct of Flinders Lane, where offerings embrace ancient Aboriginal traditions and contemporary urban trends. Outside the city there are clusters of commercial and artist-run galleries in the suburbs of Fitzroy, Richmond and Prahran. Or take a trip to the former artists' colony of Heide (www.heide.com.au) and see where Sidney Nolan, Joy Hester and Albert Tucker found their inspiration.

Here are 10 Melbourne spaces guaranteed to whet the artistic appetite.

The Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia Federation Square

(03) 8620 2222. ngv.vic.gov.au/ngvaustralia

The Ian Potter Centre houses the world's most comprehensive collection of Australian art. The ground-floor galleries are given over to the permanent indigenous art collection, spanning William Barak's 19th-century drawings to Emily Kame Kngwarreye's phenomenal, vast monochrome canvas *Big Yam Dreaming* (1995). Join a free tour led by passionate volunteer guides (details at the ground-floor information desk) and you'll learn the difference between eastern and western Arnhem Land artists in no time. Level 2 is home to the gallery's impressive store of 19th- and 20th-century Australian art, including headline works such as Tom Roberts' *Shearing The Rams*.

Albert Street galleries, Richmond

This once-gritty alley of auto garages is now a gentrified strip of seven commercial art spaces. Karen Woodbury led the revival from grease monkeys to galleries; her spare white warehouse shows contemporary artists such as Archibald Prize-winner Del Kathryn Barton and the acclaimed sculptor Lisa Roet (4 Albert Street, (03) 9421 2500, www.kwgallery.com). Next door at No.2, Sophie Gannon's stable of 12 artists includes Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, whose delicate, translucent porcelains must be the most expensive – and the most beautiful – tea sets in the country (03 9421 0857, www.sophiegannongallery.com.au). The blue-chip brigade reigns at John Buckley Gallery, where Peter D Cole's whimsical painted-metal sculptures can fetch \$40,000 (8 Albert Street, (03) 9428 8554, www.johnbuckley.com.au). ➤

Clockwise from below: a Laith McGregor exhibition at Helen Gory Galerie; second drawers down at Third Drawer Down; Helen Gory protégée Jacqui Stockdale; detail from *Maiden Voyage* pillowcase by Sarajo Frieden at Third Drawer Down

ART MELBOURNE



Third Drawer Down

93 George Street, Fitzroy. (03) 9534 4088. www.thirddrawerdown.com

It's not a gallery, but it's not strictly a shop, either. Its founders like to call it a "museum of art souvenirs". Director Abigail Crompton describes Third Drawer Down's collection as "domestic art" – limited-edition tea towels (hence the store's name), prints, doona covers, even a snow dome. All of it veers towards the subversive, as with Shrigley's malformed salt-and-pepper shakers labelled "cocaine" and "heroin". Crompton collaborates with Northern Hemisphere galleries such as London's Tate Modern and Whitechapel, and New York's Museum of Modern Art, sharing the same quirky works you'll find in this unassuming Fitzroy shopfront.

Helen Gory Galerie

25 St Edmonds Road, Prahran. (03) 9525 2808. www.helengory.com

Since opening her Prahran gallery 14 years ago, Helen Gory has earned a reputation for talent spotting. Scouring art schools, independent galleries and artist-run studios, she picks promising but unknown artists and guides them into the spotlight. Discoveries include Laith McGregor, a recent Victorian College of the Arts graduate whose work has been shown at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art and Brisbane's Institute of Modern Art. Her more established artists include the highly collectable Abbey McCulloch, Jacqui Stockdale and Toby Richardson.

RMIT Gallery

344 Swanston Street, Melbourne. (03) 9925 1717. rmit.edu.au/rmitgallery

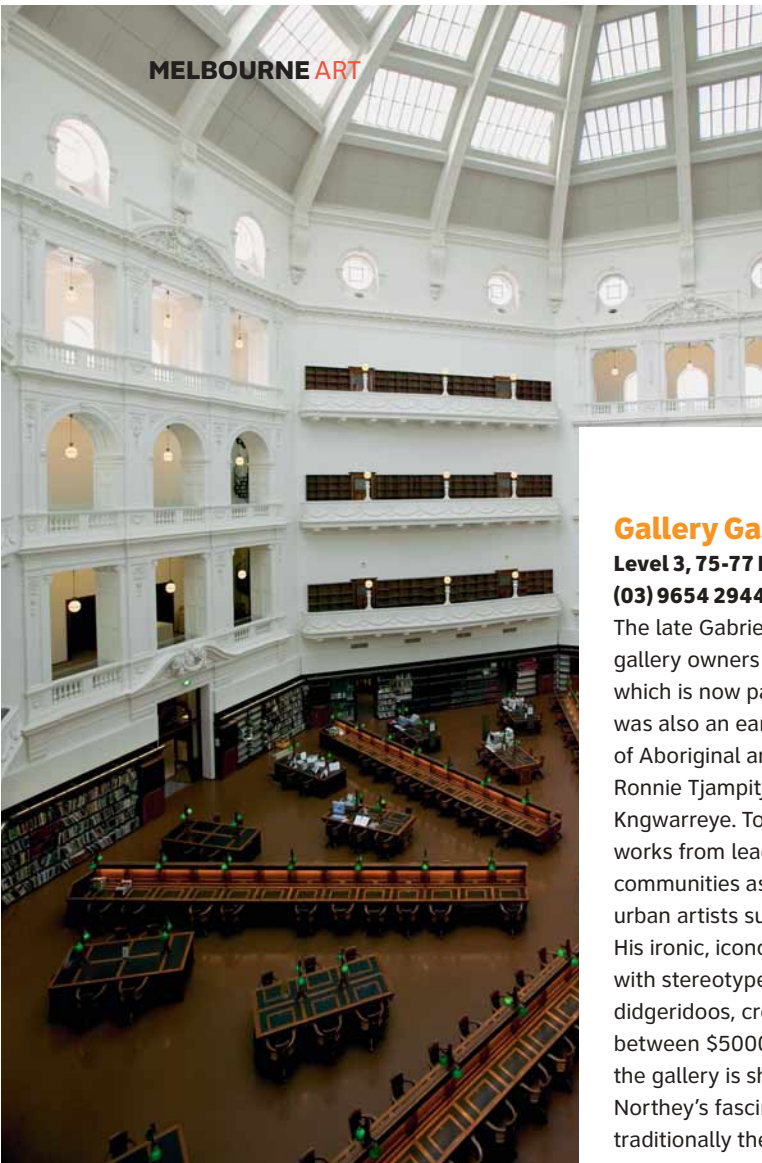
RMIT's Storey Hall has a long association with art – in 1907 it hosted an exhibition by Arthur Streeton, who would later become one of Australia's official war artists in WWI. Today it is home to the RMIT Gallery, with a diverse exhibition program covering all visual arts from painting and architecture to fashion and craft. Most displays are bound by a central theme or political statement, as with 2008's climate change show. The gallery has recently reopened after a facelift, its goldrush-era interiors and Corinthian columns gleaming.

Australian Centre For Contemporary Art

111 Sturt Street, Southbank. (03) 9697 9999. www.accaonline.org.au

Inside ACCA's sculptural exterior of rusted steel is a maze of galleries guaranteed to challenge notions of aesthetic appreciation. ACCA commissions rather than collects, engaging artists to produce out-of-the-ordinary, often provocative works. During ACCA's annual commissions show, this year titled *New09*, Matthew Griffin's three-channel video installation filled one room with the thoughts of ethicist Peter Singer, while Marco Fusinato's *Aetheric Plexus* came with a warning to viewers to expect "sudden extreme light and noise". This month ACCA has a survey of works in film, photograph and print by British art phenomenon Tacita Dean.





Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi

Level 3, 75-77 Flinders Lane, Melbourne.
(03) 9654 2944. gabriellepizzi.com.au

The late Gabrielle Pizzi was one of the first gallery owners to open in Flinders Lane, which is now packed with art outlets. She was also an early and passionate advocate of Aboriginal art, introducing the world to Ronnie Tjampitjinpa and Emily Kame Kngwarreye. Today her gallery features works from leading Aboriginal art communities as well as contemporary urban artists such as Christian Thompson. His ironic, iconoclastic photographs toy with stereotypes of Aboriginality (neon didgeridoos, cross-dressing) and sell for between \$5000 and \$11,000. Until July 11 the gallery is showing Lorraine Connelly-Northey's fascinating "narrbongs"; traditionally these are string bags, but in her hands they are wrought finely from materials such as barbed wire, sheet tin, even a galah feather.

State Library Of Victoria

328 Swanston Street, Melbourne.
(03) 8664 7000. www.slv.vic.gov.au

Secreted behind the State Library's handsome neoclassical facade are three galleries often overlooked by art lovers. Among them is the Cowen Gallery, with its permanent display of busts and oil paintings reflecting Victoria's history and heritage; significant portraits by leading figures such as Louis Buvelot and Danila Vassilieff. In the Dome galleries, the permanent Changing Face Of Victoria exhibition includes Ned Kelly's armour and Jerilderie Letter, while Mirror Of The World: Books & Ideas reveals the library's most beautiful and rare volumes – everything from a 2050BC Mesopotamian cuneiform tablet to rare first editions of Darwin's *On The Origin Of Species* and Mao's *Little Red Book*. Free daily tours at 2pm.

Centre For Contemporary Photography

404 George Street, Fitzroy.
(03) 9417 1549. www.ccp.org.au

This white-cub of a building is far from ordinary. Don't come here expecting well-mannered photographs; CCP is a platform for cutting-edge "photo-based" arts embracing anything from lightboxes and video to elaborate installations. Local talent features alongside international names such as US performance artist Miranda July (earlier this year). Popular shows include the annual Kodak Salon in April and May – Australia's largest open-entry photographic competition and exhibition – and a biannual display from the Documentary Photography Award finalists from August to September. Enthusiasts will find Chinese-made Lomo cameras in the on-site bookshop. 🌐

Wall of fame (clockwise from below): outside the Centre for Contemporary Photography; inside the State Library of Victoria; just hanging at the CCP's Kodak Salon

