



FRIDAY 24 AUGUST – SATURDAY 25 AUGUST 2012

ACTION. PAINTING. NOW.

A symposium on Abstract Expressionism



EVENT, EXHIBITION AND SPONSOR INFORMATION

Symposium dates + times

Friday 24 August, 10.00 am – 4.00 pm | Saturday 25 August, 10.00 am – 4.00 pm

Join speakers and delegates for Friday night drinks and canapes in Gandel Hall

Friday 24 August 4.00 – 6.00 pm | \$50 full; \$40 student / member / concession

Please book at the Front Desk of the Gallery. Bookings essential.

***Abstract Expressionism* exhibition dates**

International galleries 14 July 2012 – 24 February 2013

Orde Poynton Gallery 4 August 2012 – 20 January 2013

Admission Times

10.00 am – 5.00 pm every day

Did you know there is an extensive online catalogue for the exhibition

Abstract Expressionism?

Visit www.nga.gov.au/exhibition/AbstractExpress/ to read more about artists and themes, to download our Secondary School Worksheet and to view high-quality images of the works of art in the exhibition.

Contact us

Recorded information: +61 2 6240 6501

General information: +61 2 6240 6411

For visitors with mobility difficulties: +61 2 6240 6411

General email enquiries: information@nga.gov.au

Membership: 1800 020 068

United States Studies Centre

The mission of the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney is to increase understanding of the United States in Australia. The centre's activities span the study of politics and policy, economics and business, culture and society, and its ambition is to be the leading academic institution for the study of the United States outside America. As well as building networks with preeminent American academic institutions and scholars, the centre undertakes analysis, research and teaching, and is the international hub for the study of the United States.

The Terra Foundation for American Art

The Terra Foundation for American Art is dedicated to fostering exploration, understanding, and enjoyment of the visual arts of the United States for national and international audiences. Recognising the importance of experiencing original works of art, the foundation provides opportunities for interaction and study, beginning with the presentation and growth of its own art collection in Chicago. To further cross-cultural dialogue on American art, the foundation supports and collaborates on innovative exhibitions, research, and educational programs. Implicit in such activities is the belief that art has the potential both to distinguish cultures and to unite them.

ACTION. PAINTING. NOW.

A symposium on Abstract Expressionism

The remarkable impact of Jackson Pollock, Morris Louis and their contemporaries is still felt today. Leading American scholars Branden Joseph, Ellen Landau, Michael Leja and Richard Shiff join Australian experts to explore the development, reach and influence of Abstract Expressionism. Presented by the National Gallery of Australia in association with the United States Studies Centre, University of Sydney, and supported and the Terra Foundation for American Art.

The symposium is convened by Roger Benjamin, Professor of Art History at United States Studies Centre & Department of Art History and Film Studies, University of Sydney, and Lucina Ward, Curator, International Painting and Sculpture, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.



(Above) **Morris Louis**, *Beta nu* 1960, synthetic polymer paint on unprimed canvas, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1972. © 1960 Morris Louis.

(Cover) **Jackson Pollock**, *Blue poles* 1952 (detail), oil, enamel, aluminium paint, glass on canvas, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 1973, © Pollock/Krasner Foundation/ARS. Licensed by Viscopy.

PROGRAM

DAY ONE: Friday 24 August

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| 9:30 | Doors open for coffee and registration
Gandel Hall, Ground Level, National Gallery of Australia |
| 10:00 | Welcome by NGA Director Ron Radford
James O Fairfax Theatre, Level One, National Gallery of Australia
Chair: Roger Benjamin, Professor of Art History, USSC |
| 10:10 | Richard Shiff: <i>Willem de Kooning: The kick, the twist, the woman, the rowboat</i> |
| 10:55 | Michael Hill: <i>Looking for trouble: Leo Steinberg vs Clement Greenberg</i> |
| 11:15 | Rex Butler: <i>What was Abstract Expressionism?: Abstract Expressionism through Aboriginal Art</i> |
| 12:00 | Lunch, Gandel Hall |
| 13:00 | Michael Leja: <i>Explosive serenity, divine hellfire: Rothko's abstractions</i> |
| 13:45 | Christine Dixon: <i>Frankenthaler and Louis: No drawing, no more</i> |
| 14:30 | Questions and discussion time |
| 15:00 | Afternoon tea, Gandel Hall |
| 15:30 | Viewing of exhibition <i>Abstract Expressionism</i> |
| 16:00 | Drinks reception commences in Gandel Hall |

PROGRAM

DAY TWO: Saturday 25 August

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| 9:30 | Doors open for coffee and registration
Gandel Hall, Ground Level, National Gallery of Australia |
| 10:00 | Welcome by Dr Sean Gallagher, COO, USSC
James O Fairfax Theatre, Level One, National Gallery of Australia
Chair: Lucina Ward, Curator, International Painting and Sculpture, NGA |
| 10:05 | Ellen G Landau: <i>Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock: The erotics of influence</i> |
| 10:50 | Anthony White: <i>Pollock's Blue poles: Unfinished business</i> |
| 11:35 | Patrick McCaughey: <i>'Every kind of painting': Early Antipodean responses to Blue poles</i> |
| 12:00 | Lunch, Gandel Hall |
| 13:00 | Deborah Hart: <i>Writ large: Robert Motherwell, Tony Tuckson and Peter Upward</i> |
| 13:40 | Branden W Joseph: <i>'To work in total art is hard as hell': Claes Oldenburg's legacy of Jackson Pollock</i> |
| 14:25 | Chris McAuliffe: <i>Fear of a drip planet: Jackson Pollock, punk and the decrepitude of art</i> |
| 15:10 | Afternoon tea, Gandel Hall |
| 15:40 | Roger Benjamin: questions, discussion and summing up |
| 16:00 | End of program |

ABSTRACTS BIOGRAPHIES

Rex Butler: *What was Abstract Expressionism?: Abstract Expressionism through Aboriginal Art*

Amongst the many Western art movements that Aboriginal art is compared to, one of them is Abstract Expressionism. That is to say, Aboriginal art is understood through Abstract Expressionism. But what would happen if we reversed the poles and understood Abstract Expressionism through Aboriginal art? One of the things that Aboriginal art might bring to Abstract Expressionism is the category of meaningfulness, and more precisely the category of meaningfulness without a meaning. Indeed, it is precisely by means of this category that we might distinguish Abstract Expressionism from abstract art in general.

In this paper, I will outline this distinction through the work of the American philosopher Stanley Cavell, and attempt to show how it plays itself out in the criticism of one of Cavell's great followers, the art historian Michael Fried. We will see how the search for 'intention' we find in Abstract Expressionism is replaced by the need to find 'motivation' that drives abstraction. It is for this reason that something ended in art with the passing of Abstract Expressionism, at least until it came back with Aboriginal art.

Rex Butler teaches in the School of English, Media Studies and Art History at the University of Queensland. He is a widely-published art critic and historian whose books include *The secret history of Australian art* (2002), *SlavojZizek: Live theory* (2005), and two edited collections, *What is appropriation?* (1996) and *Radical revisionism: An anthology of writings on Australian art* (2005). His latest publication is the edited *Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe: Art after deconstruction* (2011). He is currently working on a critical biography of the New Zealand painter Colin McCahon, and a revisionist history of 'UnAustralian' art.

Christine Dixon: *Frankenthaler and Louis: No drawing, no more*

When we look at the work of post-war pioneer painters, the so-called 'second generation' of Abstract Expressionism, something strikes us: drawing has disappeared from their art. The role of drawing in works by Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning and Arshile Gorky is surprisingly traditional, particularly in articulating ideas about composition, and the way marks are made. First for Helen Frankenthaler, and then for Morris Louis, drawing with pencil, pen and ink or charcoal no longer prefigures the object, and is no longer included in the act of creation. The brush, used as an implement for drawing with paint, is also rendered nugatory. Now it is canvas which interacts with pigment, without the intermediary technique of drawing. How did this revolution come about? Was it a necessary condition for the seeming transformation of traditional painting in the 1960s, and then the rejection of painting itself for younger artists? Is the second rather a new generation?

Christine Dixon is Senior Curator, International Painting and Sculpture, at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. She was appointed to the Gallery in 1986, and has curated exhibitions on Chinese woodcuts, the Russian Ballet, William Morris and 1968. She co-curated the major exhibitions *Turner to Monet: The triumph of landscape painting in the nineteenth century* (2008), and *Masterpieces from Paris: Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne and beyond. Post-Impressionism from the Musée d'Orsay* (2009–10) and was co-ordinating curator of *Renaissance* (2012). Her particular interest is European modernism 1890–1940 and she is currently working on the Surrealist artist Max Ernst.

Deborah Hart: *Writ large: Robert Motherwell, Tony Tuckson and Peter Upward*

The works of Motherwell, Tuckson and Upward suggest expansive visions. Writ large, the impact of their most distinctive paintings comes through emphatic gesture and archetypal forms. Motherwell once remarked that before Abstract Expressionism, American artists wanted to be more 'international'. Like his Australian counterparts, this meant looking to Europe and Asia; in Motherwell's case, to Spain and Mexico. Motherwell, Tuckson and Upward wanted to find ways to bridge the gap between inner life and the outer world. Motherwell found his leitmotif in his multiple *Elegies to the Spanish Republic*, while Upward's *June celebration* 1960 remains the most enduring expression of his interest in Zen and calligraphy. Tuckson's late 'white stripe' paintings drew inspiration from American, European and (perhaps most significantly) Aboriginal art and culture. Intriguingly, Daniel Thomas once described one of these works, *White over red on blue* c.1971, as Tuckson's 'White poles', a reference to Pollock's painting. With the benefit of hindsight there may be more to this than meets the eye.

Deborah Hart is Senior Curator of Australian Paintings and Sculpture post-1920 at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Over the last 30 years she has worked for State and regional galleries, and as a freelance curator. In 1993 she curated the first major exhibition of contemporary Australian art in Taiwan, and was a guest curator for the 1999 Asia-Pacific Triennial at the Queensland Art Gallery. Her exhibitions at the National Gallery include those on Joy Hester, Grace Cossington Smith, Imants Tillers, Richard Larter and, most recently, *Fred Williams: Infinite horizons*, a touring retrospective. *Andy and Oz: Parallel visions*, her exhibition at the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, brought together works by Warhol and Australian artists. Dr Hart has written numerous publications on Australian art and is currently working on Arthur Boyd's artistic legacy across various media.

Michael Hill: *Looking for trouble: Leo Steinberg vs Clement Greenberg*

The New York art critic and historian Leo Steinberg (1920-2011) began his career when Clement Greenberg (1909-1991) was at the height of his powers. Immediately, Steinberg called him out, taunting his position in two essays of the early 1950s. Greenberg responded mildly – he was accustomed to dissenters and by now he was confident that he had history on his side. Greenberg reigned for the next ten years; meanwhile, Steinberg continued to build his case, reviewing Abstract Expressionists for their subject matter as much as their command of form, championing artists slighted as minor by Greenberg (Rauschenberg, Johns), and cultivating in his burgeoning art history scholarship a general position against those who would prefer art for its shapes and patterns alone. The paper examines the (admittedly asymmetrical) dispute between two of the era's finest critics, setting it against the time when art ceased to be contained by the normal interpretative boundaries.

Michael Hill is the coordinator of History and Theory at the National Art School in Sydney, where he teaches courses on modernism and contemporary art. His research interests include classical architectural theory, portraiture, and the seventeenth century. Since publishing his prize-winning essay 'Cardinal dying: Bernini's bust of Scipione Borghese' (*Australian Journal of Art*, 1998) Dr Hill has written several articles on theories of decorum and on seventeenth building in Rome for *Architectural research quarterly* and *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. Dr Hill has recently completed a study of Leo Steinberg's doctoral dissertation on Francesco Borromini, which will appear in a book on Modernism and the Baroque in 2013.

Branden W Joseph: *'To work in total art is hard as hell': Claes Oldenburg's legacy of Jackson Pollock*

Discussion of Jackson Pollock's influence on the post-Abstract Expressionist genres of Happenings and Pop Art have long been dominated by Allan Kaprow's 1958 essay, 'The legacy of Jackson Pollock.' Despite being a close associate of Kaprow's, the artist Claes Oldenburg would develop his own, equally profound, reception of Pollock's work in the context of his performative environments *The street* 1960 and, especially, *The store* 1962. Drawing upon archival materials and conversations with the artist, this presentation seeks to elucidate Oldenburg's reception and development of Abstract Expressionism, one that entails a re-casting of some of the most canonic understandings of Pollock's importance for the 1960s.

Branden W Joseph is the Frank Gallipoli Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at Columbia University and a founding editor of the journal *Grey room*. In addition to more than four dozen articles in the fields of contemporary art, music, and cinema, he is author of four books: *The Roh and the cooked: Tony Conrad and Beverly Grant in Europe* (2012), *Beyond the dream syndicate: Tony Conrad and the arts after Cage* (2008), *Anthony McCall: The solid light films and related works* (2005), and *Random order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (2003), which will appear in French translation this year.

Ellen G Landau: *Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock: The erotics of influence*

This lecture explores Lee Krasner's intimate and aesthetic union with Jackson Pollock, one of the most exceptional creative partnerships of the twentieth century. Krasner agreed with Pollock that 'Painting is self-discovery. Every *good* artist paints what he is,' explaining, 'I am preoccupied with trying to know myself in order to communicate with others. Painting is not separate from life. It is one.' 'My painting,' she added, 'is so biographical if anyone can take the trouble to read it.' Krasner progressed only after admitting reluctantly that to rely on her own experience meant acknowledging her familiarity with—and somewhat collaborative role in— her husband's remarkable development. Focus will be placed on psychological ramifications of the couple's interconnection and how these were both sublimated and exposed in a set of collage paintings Krasner produced in the mid-1950s. In these, she utilised Pollock's phrases but began to express an alternative, more self-empowered meaning.

Ellen G Landau is Andrew W. Mellon Professor of the Humanities at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. Her publications include *Jackson Pollock* (1989; reprint 2010) and *Lee Krasner: A catalogue raisonné* (1995). She was co-curator for a Krasner/Pollock retrospective at the Kunstmuseum Bern (1989). In 2005 she produced an anthology and study of criticism, *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and critique*. Recent curatorial projects include *Pollock matters* (Boston College, 2007), a look at the artistic and personal relationship of Pollock and photographer Herbert Matter, and a touring US retrospective of Mercedes Matter, noted painter and arts educator. *Mexico and American Modernism*, a new interpretation of the impact of Mexico and Mexican art on Pollock, Robert Motherwell, Isamu Noguchi and Philip Guston will be published by Yale University Press in 2013, supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Michael Leja: *Explosive serenity, divine hellfire: Rothko's abstractions*

Although he occasionally professed to hate art critics, Mark Rothko had a surprisingly productive relationship with some of them. They helped him understand and explain his work by giving him words and metaphors to embrace and reject. His art, while deliberately abstract, was deeply invested in allusive references that he tried to control, multiply, and balance. His critics helped him meet this persistent challenge: together they engaged in a contradictory process of invoking, layering, and disavowing allusions and associations. The 'explosive serenity' and 'divine hellfire' evoked through finely tuned combinations of composition, colour, density, and edges sought to instil in viewers experiences of intense conflict, paradox, and oxymoron. Rothko wanted to make abstract form generate contradictory feelings experienced simultaneously: calm and agitation, stability and instability, hope and despair. 'The nobility and the contemplative exaltation of art is a hollow shell unless it has as its core, unless it is filled to the point of bulging by the wild,' he wrote.

Michael Leja is the author of *Reframing Abstract Expressionism: Subjectivity and painting in the 1940s*, which situates the paintings of Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, and others in a culture-wide initiative to re-imagine the self in the midst of a traumatic history. It won the Charles Eldredge Prize for Distinguished Scholarship in American Art from the Smithsonian Institution in 1995. A subsequent book, *Looking askance: Skepticism and American art from Eakins to Duchamp* (2004) traces the interactions between the visual arts and the sceptical forms of seeing engendered in modern life in northeastern American cities between 1869 and 1917. It won the Modernist Studies Association Book Prize in 2005. He is currently at work on a book exploring changes in pictorial forms and in social relations associated with the industrialisation of picture production and the development of a mass market for images in the mid-nineteenth century. Professor Leja teaches History of Art and Visual Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Chris McAuliffe: *Fear of a drip planet: Jackson Pollock, punk and the decrepitude of art*

Since the early 1950s Jackson Pollock's art has circulated within popular culture, often through fashion, graphic and industrial design. Pollock's drip technique in particular has attained a vernacular status. Within punk and new wave music, such luminaries as Patti Smith and The Clash have invoked the painter as a father figure. The confronting formal and semantic density of Pollock's poured skeins of paint has been translated into a kind of vitalist wallpaper signifying energy and 'artiness'. With the drip now a mass-cultural hieroglyph, what is the state of the artist's legacy? Has the drip succumbed to the corrosive effects of Mid-cult and postmodern pastiche? How can contemporary artists recover Pollock's legacy for the present?

Chris McAuliffe is Director of the Ian Potter Museum of Art at the University of Melbourne. Prior to that he was for ten years a lecturer in the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Melbourne. In 2011–12 he was the Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser Visiting Professor in Australian Studies at Harvard University, where he was based in the Department of History of Art and Architecture. Chris McAuliffe has researched and written extensively in the area of contemporary art, and is the author of *Art and suburbia* (1996), *Linda Marrinon: Let her try* (2007), and *Jon Cattapan: Possible histories* (2008). He is currently writing a book on the afterlife of Jackson Pollock in popular music.

Patrick McCaughey: 'Every kind of painting': Early Antipodean responses to Blue poles

An early comment on *Blue Poles* when it arrived in Australia was that it was 'every kind of painting,' that it was both a summation of Pollock's art and of earlier forces and styles in modern art. This became an important element in the public defence of the work. What disturbed the public, even the chattering classes, was the apparent arbitrariness of the painting, focusing on Pollock's method of dripping and pouring paint. WS Rubin's 1967 series of articles on 'Jackson Pollock and the Modern Tradition', little known in Australia in the mid 1970s, became an important source in defending the masterpiece before its cultured despisers.

Patrick McCaughey has been Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut and the Yale Center for British Art. He has published monographs on Fred Williams and Jan Senbergs, edited the correspondence of Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan and written an Australian memoir, *The bright shapes and the true names*. He lives, writes and works in New Haven Connecticut.

Richard Shiff: Willem de Kooning: The kick, the twist, the woman, the rowboat

Among the New York School artists, Willem de Kooning was unusual in being primarily a painter of the human figure. He had no commitment to abstract (non-figurative, non-representational) art, and even spoke against the distinction between figure and abstraction as a valid issue to raise. De Kooning seems to have rendered the figure by imagining another person's body within his own; he would sometimes stretch or bend while working, as if in imitation of the form he wished to represent, converting it to a set of curious linear configurations. In the process, the painter, a man, sometimes identified with a woman's body. This lecture explores de Kooning's remarkable techniques and themes.

Richard Shiff is Effie Marie Cain Regents Chair in Art at The University of Texas at Austin, where he directs the Center for the Study of Modernism. His scholarly interests range broadly across the field of modern and contemporary art. His publications include *Cézanne and the end of Impressionism* (1984), *Critical terms for Art History* (co-edited, 1996, 2003), *Barnett Newman: A catalogue raisonné* (co-authored, 2004), *Doubt* (2008), and *Between sense and de Kooning* (2011). Some of his most recent essays have featured the artists Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Donald Judd, Cy Twombly, Per Kirkeby, Marlene Dumas, Richard Serra, Joel Shapiro, Mark Bradford, Peter Doig, Julie Mehretu, and Hiroshi Sugimoto.

Anthony White: Pollock's Blue poles: *Unfinished business*

In *Blue poles: Number 11* 1952 Jackson Pollock reflected upon his career by negating an element of his own practice. The drip technique which he had developed since 1947, and which had its culmination in the so-called 'classic' drip paintings of 1950, might serve to illustrate space, the natural world or the psyche. Several novel aspects of the painting, including the use of a mechanical device to create the eight 'poles' which appear across the canvas surface, betray Pollock's anxieties about the effectiveness of his drip painting style in moving away from the art of the past. Drawing on the writings of T J Clark, Rosalind Krauss and Jordan Kantor, and analysing the deep contradictions that the artist lodged within this work, I will demonstrate how in *Blue poles* Pollock continued his task of jettisoning the 'extra cargo' of image-making in his work.

Anthony White, a Senior Lecturer in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne, is the author of *Lucio Fontana: between avant-garde and kitsch* (2011) and has published articles in refereed journals *October*, *Grey Room*, *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, *emaj*, *Papers of Surrealism*, *Reading Room* and the *Art Bulletin of Victoria*. From 2000 to 2002 he was Curator of International Painting and Sculpture at the National Gallery of Australia where he curated several major exhibitions including Jackson Pollock's *Blue poles* (2002). He has held visiting fellowships at The Australian National University and the Center for Advanced Studies in the Visual Arts, Washington, DC, and has been awarded research grants from the Australian Research Council.



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Since opening our doors in 2008, the United States Studies Centre at the University of Sydney has taken significant strides towards increasing the understanding of the United States in Australia.

Through our one-of-a-kind educational programs and cutting-edge think tank research, the Centre is leading the way in the study of the US outside America and building bridges between the two countries.

Our Washington DC Internship Program gives University of Sydney students the opportunity to study, live and work in America, a life-changing experience helping emerging Australian leaders globalise their world views.

With support from the Australian government and leading corporations, our 21st Century Australia-US Alliance project is bringing together the best minds from both countries on how best to further their shared values and interests in the Asia-Pacific century.

The Centre promotes cross-cultural understanding through its support of the arts. In 2012 we have proudly supported the Seattle Art Museum's Ancestral Modern exhibition, the Biennale of Sydney and the Abstract Expressionism Symposium at the National Gallery of Australia.

To find out more, visit: ussc.edu.au

GALLERY MAP

-  escalator
-  lift
-  cafes
-  restaurant
-  toilets
-  cloaking

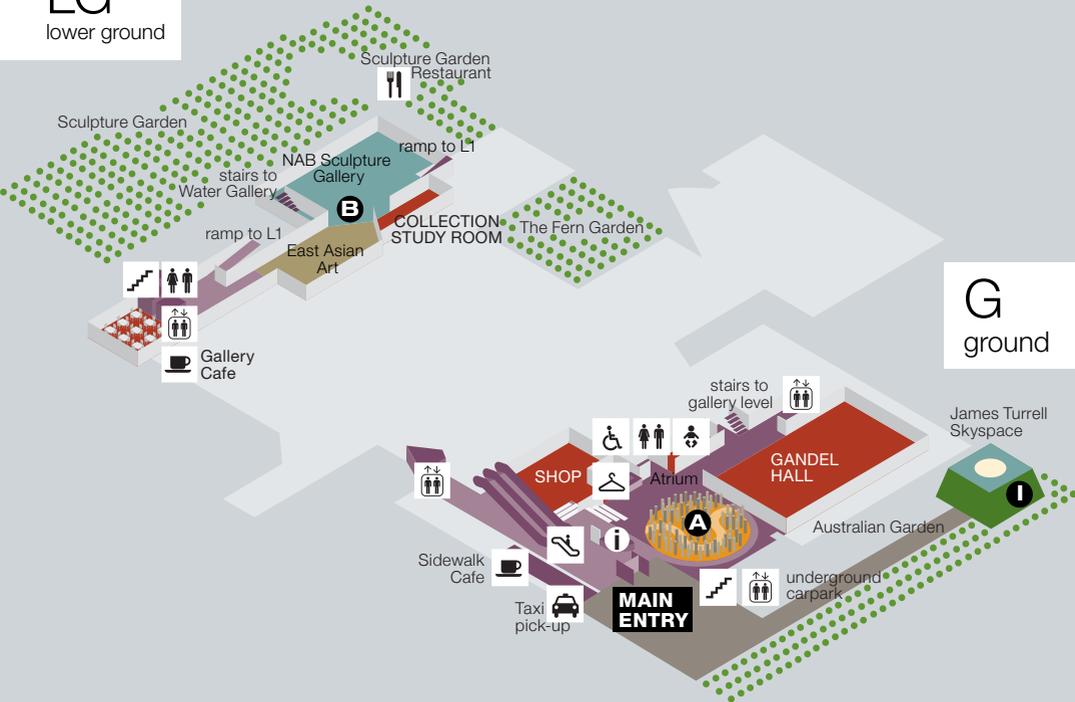
-  Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
-  Impressionism to Pop
-  1 Photography
-  2 Fashion and Asian costume
-  3 Jewellery
-  Australian
-  Asian
-  Polynesian and Melanesian
-  Project Gallery
-  Childrens Gallery
-  Gardens

LG

lower ground

G

ground





ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

National Gallery of Australia
International galleries until 24 February 2013
Orde Poynton Gallery until 20 January 2013