



## Newsletter 31 ♦ April 2026



*The Love Letter (detail), Johannes Vermeer, 1668*

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## From the Chair with Cas Veriga

Greetings All,

I can't get over how quickly this year seems to be speeding along. Here we are in Autumn, a beautiful time in Northern Rivers, and our year has kicked off with two very successful presentations so far and we've got so many more to look forward to. The Committee and I have particularly enjoyed getting to know you – our members, our new members and their guests.

On 18<sup>th</sup> May, we are offering a fascinating presentation on the works of the renown *enfant terrible*, Damien Hirst, delivered by David Worthington at the usual time of a 6.30 in the A & I Hall at Bangalow.

In June, we've made a change! Diarise now! Due to a conflict with Bangalow Film Society we needed to change venues but only for this presentation. Planning and organising our events is done many months in advance (we're organising 2027 lectures now), and given we had to find an alternative venue we thought we would test both a different day and time and get your feedback.

Details for this presentation only are:

**Venue: Moller Pavillion, Bangalow.**

**Date: Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June**

**Time: 3.30 pm for 4pm start**

The Committee will be looking forward to hearing your comments so that we can produce the very best experience for you as members of Arts National Northern Rivers In 2027. We can make a change, change only some things or stay the same – it's up to you!

A big thankyou to our hard-working Committee who have instigated a lot of new initiatives in 2026 – and a warm welcome to our newest Committee member, Gavin Emery.

Marion has once again done a great job in creating this April newsletter and I'm



Cas Veriga

sure you will all enjoy it as much as I did. Feel free to drop me an email about any comments or suggestions, especially about your free guest pass, valued at \$30 and valid for our March event. What did you and your guests think? Would you like to see more of these types of promotions?

Email: [northernrivers@artsnational.au](mailto:northernrivers@artsnational.au)

We're also continuing our Young Arts Program in support of our talented youth. And we need your help and donations. This financial help will assist in supporting students in gaining more education in their nominated field of the arts. These students are our future, please support.

Stay safe and well and looking forward to seeing you all very soon.

Best,

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## The Value of Art

Most of us appreciate art for its aesthetic value, its narrative, or the talent of its creator, however there are those who view art as a financial investment, and the prices they are willing to pay is staggering. In November last year, Sotheby's New York exceeded expectations as records were shattered at the auctions for modern and contemporary art, and surrealist art.

On November 18, Gustav Klimt's *Portrait of Elisabeth Lederer* commanded \$236.4 million, topping the sales of 20th-century masterpieces. The previous record was held by Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (Version O, 1955)* at \$179.4 million.

Klimt was a force behind the 'Vienna Secession' a movement founded in 1897 to unify painting, architecture, and the decorative arts. Part of their intent was to break free of the traditional orientation toward historicism.

He used gold in most of his paintings, and frequently featured ancient Egyptian and Japanese elements.



*Bildnis Elisabeth Lederer, Gustav Klimt, 1914-16*

Conservatives labelled Klimt's work as 'pornographic' and 'perverted excess'. He sexualised women's bodies, portraying them as sensual erotic beings endowed with symbolism and often immersed in a syrupy fluid or mosaic patterns.

His morals were as free as his paintings. He slept with all his models – from working girls to high society ladies. Although he never married, he acknowledged five illegitimate children and at the time of his death had 14 paternity suits pending.



*El sueño (La cama), Frida Kahlo, 1940*

The same week as the Klimt sale, Sotheby's also set a new auction record for a female artist. Frida Kahlo's self-portrait, *El sueño (La cama)* fetched \$54.7 million (AUD \$84.7 million), surpassing the \$44.4 million sale of Georgia O'Keeffe's *Jimson Weed/White Flower No. 1* in 2014.

The painting depicts Kahlo asleep with a smiling dynamite-wrapped skeleton above her. She had endured excruciating pain her whole life and was mostly bedridden before her death in 1954. She had written, "I joyfully await the exit – and I hope never to return – Frida."

Marion Pescud

## March Presentation: Johannes Vermeer and the Absent Subject

Our first event for the year was a fabulous presentation on Vermeer by international art expert Dr Albert Godetzsky. Articulate and witty, Albert's very informative lecture was accompanied by a quality slide show featuring Vermeer's painting and the works of his contemporaries from which to make comparative analyses.



Vermeer, *Self-portrait*, 1656  
Detail from 'The Procuress'

Some knowledge of Vermeer's personal circumstances, of Dutch politics and culture at the time is required to understand the influences and motives behind his work. His father was an art dealer in Delft who on his death in 1652, left Vermeer with debt and a failing business. A way forward required a wealthy spouse, which he duly found and fathered at least 12 children.

To marry he had to convert to Catholicism, a risky move under the Calvinist Protestant government which rejected religious symbolism. Churches were whitewashed – covering the iconoclastic art of the former catholic Habsburg kings. Vermeer had to worship in 'secret' catholic devotional spaces. For financial reasons his art had to be secular, although conveying high moral ideals of the conservative establishment. Even so, Vermeer managed to inject subtle religious references in his work.

While dying relatively young and in poverty, Vermeer's small volume of works was initially overlooked, however when French art historian Théophile Thoré-Bürger published a monograph on Vermeer in 1866, the artist became a global phenomenon. Thoré-Bürger credited Vermeer with having produced 77 paintings, but today's scholars recognise only 34 with five still unaccounted for.

Since then, there has not been a year without a new book published or exhibition held. While Vermeer has been studied from every angle, Albert chose to concentrate on the unique characteristics of his work – the subject, composition, brush techniques, atmospheric light, and perspective.



*Allegory of the Catholic Faith*, Vermeer, 1670-72,  
Metropolitan Museum of Art New York



The Art of Painting, Vermeer, 1666-68  
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

As the rich were the patrons of the arts, their preferred subjects were symbols of wealth, moral messages and pride the Netherlands successful maritime expansion. The inclusion of exotic objects collected from far-flung continents gave substance to the claim of sophisticated worldliness. Statues, time-pieces, musical instruments also conveyed positive cultural significance. Devotional paintings became just objects as the artworld turned its attention to genre.

Vermeer did not paint portraits, he used tronie – an imaginary subject which could conform to his idea of perfection. His paintings featured a duality of the main subject/s and of interior details which provided clues to a secret narrative. What were they thinking? Who wrote the letter? Was the girl chaste or not?

His compositions were planned in detail. They held his subjects in blissful stillness while juxtaposed with just enough detailed objects to provoke a quest to decipher the mystery. Yet, his genius for reduction –

extracting any extraneous elements – allowed the viewer to be caught in a fleeting moment in time. The reduction contributed to the clarity of the composition.

Some parts of his work, mainly the foregrounds, are painted in a blurred, almost abstract fashion which seems to vibrate. It is a technique which often reverses the perspective. Occasionally, brush strokes are visible. Possibly his greatest accomplishment was his treatment of light. He used it to set the atmosphere and to construct space. The reflectiveness of glass and mirrors were another optical feature, as were the few dabs of 'lead white' on a mouth which could give the illusion of moist lips.

Many scholars believed that Vermeer used a home-made type of camera obscura, which resulted in the subject been seen upside-down but allowed him to view a rounded object on a flat two-dimensional plane.



Lady with a Pearl Necklace, c. 1662-64  
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin



*Images courtesy of Dr Albert Godetzky*

While Vermeer's paintings were a uniquely wonderful output, they adhered to social and cultural expectations of the day in order to be commercially desirable. But his compositions and techniques were solely his own. He has inspired many artists – his contemporaries and those that came after. Even photographers have used his works as inspiration. Albert completed his presentation with the perfect example relatable to all Australians.

A short series of questions and answers followed the lecture and many in the audience were in awe of Albert's in-depth and knowledgeable responses, along with his quick-witted delivery. The evening was a great way in every respect to begin our 2026 program. Thank you, Albert.

 Marion Pescud

## March Home Hosts

It was an honour to host Dr Albert Godetzky, a truly international citizen who now calls France home. He was an excellent conversationalist and a very easy house guest, and truly a joy to host. He enjoyed the sights of our region, particularly our lush landscape and the wild surf at Snapper Rocks.

When not lecturing for ArtsNational, Albert is on the steering committee of a private foundation which holds an important collection of 16-17<sup>th</sup> century Netherlandish art. Based in a 17<sup>th</sup> century palace in Leiden, it is due to open in 2030.

Why not enjoy the experience of home-hosting a visiting lecturer yourself?



*Craig Snyder, Marion Pescud and Dr Albert Godetzky*



Dive with us into  
the Wonderful World of the Arts



## March Raffle



Toska McLeod with artist Marion Pescud

Happy winners of our double-prize raffle were Toska McLeod who chose the original water-colour painting by Marion Pescud, and Elaine Olive who received a hardcover book, *Master Painters of the Dutch Golden Age*, a biographical guide to some of the greatest Dutch artists with over 500 images of their works.



Elaine Olive

## March Post-Presentation Supper



After a stimulating lecture, it was wonderful for members and guests to gather for refreshments and catch up following the long summer break.



# Post-Presentation Supper



## Francis Bacon: A Tortured Life



*Francis Bacon*

Known for his raw, emotionally charged imagery, UK artist Francis Bacon (1909 – 1992) endured a childhood of violence and emotional repression. His sense of displacement, combined with physical and psychological abuse influenced his art, and his work sought to explore the human condition in its most basic form.

Born in Dublin, Ireland, to English parents, Bacon was the second eldest of five children. His father was born in Adelaide, South Australia, and was a descendant of Sir Francis Bacon, the Elizabethan statesman, philosopher, and essayist. His mother was heiress to a Sheffield steel business and coal mine.

Bacon was not a robust child and as such, his formal education was sporadic with a private tutor to supplement his lessons. He was shy with an effeminate manner which angered his father and led to many violent assaults. It was reported that his father had him horsewhipped by a groom when his homosexuality began to emerge. He was later ordered to leave the family home when his father discovered him parading in his mother's underwear.

After being expelled from his family home, Bacon lived on an allowance of £3 a week from his mother's trust fund. He survived by engaging in petty theft. He was briefly employed in domestic service but became bored and resigned, then he was sacked from a retail telephone-answering position after writing a poison-pen letter to the owner.

In an interview, Bacon said that, he wandered between London, Berlin, and Paris, where he explored his sexual identity with a carousel of tumultuous encounters with fascinating but destructive men.

Bacon returned to London in the winter of 1928/29 to work as an interior designer. There he met his patron, Eric Hall, and they embarked on a long and abusive relationship. In 1943 the pair moved into the former home and studio of Everett Millais. Bacon's former nanny moved in with them, and together the three held illicit roulette parties.



*Two figures, Francis Bacon, 1953*

In 1952, Bacon met Peter Lacy, a pianist, former RAF pilot, violent alcoholic, and the love of his life. The pair engaged in an off and on relationship with a significant sadomasochistic aspect. In 1962, Lacy died from the effects of alcoholism the day before Bacon opened a retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London.

A year later, Bacon met George Dyer – a 30-year-old from a London East End crime family. They were both borderline alcoholics and were obsessive with their appearance. Dyer became a

dominating presence in Bacon's paintings. As Dyer's standing diminished within Bacon's circle of friends, he became increasingly bitter and ill at ease, descending further into alcoholism. By 1970 Bacon was merely providing Dyer with enough money to stay permanently drunk.

In 1971, Bacon's career was at a peak and he was described as Britain's 'greatest living painter'. Dyer suicided in Paris by an overdose of barbiturates just before the opening of Bacon's retrospective at the Grand Palais. The artist continued with the retrospective with stoicism, but afterward he suffered an emotional and physical breakdown. He told friends that 'daemons, disaster and loss stalked him'.

Death haunted his life and his work. In the following two years he painted a number of single canvas portraits of Dyer, and the three highly regarded 'Black Triptychs', each detailing the moments immediately before and after Dyer's suicide.

Bacon revealed that in his later years, as death drew closer, he sought to rebuild himself through the brush. He said, "the shadows of the past never left me, leaving me with a deep melancholy and a complex legacy." his works were sombre pieces preoccupied with death. He died of a heart attack while on holiday in Madrid, aged 82.

Bacon was in his late 20s when he seriously focused on painting. His breakthrough came with the 1944 triptych, *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of the Crucifixion* which sealed his reputation as a bleak chronicler of the human condition. From the mid-1960s, he produced portraits of friends in single, diptych or triptych formats. His style was influenced by surrealism, old masters, and a book he purchased second-hand on diseases of the mouth!



From the 'Screaming Pope Series, Bacon, 1953



*Three studies for a crucifixion, triptych, Bacon, 1962*

Bacon's reputation has grown post-humously, and his ability to evoke deep emotion has made his paintings some of the most important works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His paintings are now among the most expensive and sought-after within the art world.

## April Presentation: Degenerates and Perverts: The Legendary 1939 Herald Exhibition

This exhibition has become so significant in the Australian art world that it has been subject to many myths, half-truths and untruths in its recorded history. Steven Miller, author and former head of the National Art Archive at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, presented an engaging lecture on the famous 1939 Herald Exhibition, clarifying the stories and explaining the cultural and political upheaval surrounding it.



Steven Miller

While researching for their book *Degenerates and Perverts: The 1939 Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art*, Steven and co-author Eileen Chanin, discovered that not only did the Exhibition stir heated debate while on display – but long after. They gained unique insights by speaking to everyone they could find who attended the exhibition.

Steven labelled the exhibition a tremendous revelatory experience for both artists and the public. While it is reported that it opened in Melbourne, it actually opened in Adelaide, before heading to Melbourne, then Sydney. In Adelaide it was accepted as a progressive exhibition of modern art by the State Gallery. In Melbourne and Sydney, the directors and trustees of the major galleries refused to support it in any way. It was held at the Town Hall in Melbourne where it attracted the greatest crowds. In Sydney it was staged on the top floor of David Jones department store creating turmoil between the public, and political and artist groups – those who recognised the artworks as contemporary masterpieces, and those who found them too sexually explicit and amateurish.

The exhibition was the idea of Sir Keith Murdoch and financed through his Herald group of newspapers. It was curated by the art critic Basil Burdett. One of Steven's interviewee's suggested that there was an emotional attachment between Murdoch and Burdett, and after his death Murdoch was found in his apartment destroying correspondence.

As World War II raged on, the artwork owners would not take the risk of having them returned to Europe so Murdoch agreed to pay the extra insurance and find storage within Australia for the duration of the war. This caused more controversy. While the original plan was to store them in the basement of The Gallery of New South Wales, public outcry demanded that they continue on tour. The exhibition was split and smaller exhibitions of the works travelled

to Tasmania and Queensland. The Gallery director and trustees were not happy about the attention the works were continuing to generate. They balked against modern art.



Steven presented a reason for their hostile resistance. There was a strong antisemitic sway from the establishment. The trustees, many of them artists, purchased each other works for the gallery collections. Their favour and finances would take a hit if a vogue for contemporary art became popular.

J. S. McDonald Director the of National Gallery of Victoria wrote of the exhibition: 'They are exceedingly wretched paintings ... putrid meat ... the product of degenerates and perverts ... filth'.



Steven discussed several of the paintings featured in the exhibition and told of their fate. Australian galleries were loathe to purchase the works, only acquiring some them years later at a much greater price. Two of the works turned out to be fakes!

The presentation not only highlighted divisions with in the art world, but exposed cronyism, racism, and how far behind was Australia's acceptance of moving forward.

✉ Marion Pescud

Left: Giorgio de Chirico, *Scuola di gladiatori*, 1927. Private collection, Italy.



Salvador Dalí, *La mémoire de la femme-enfant*, 1932. Dali Museum, Florida.

## April Raffle



Esther Button won the beautiful volume *Degenerates and Perverts: The 1939 Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art*, co-authored by Eileen Chanin and the evening's presenter Steven Miller.

The second winner was Chris Chaseling who received a Van Gogh inspired tea towel.

Left: Esther Button with Steven Miller

Right: Chris Chaseling





## April Home-Host

Steven Miller enjoyed the generous hospitality of Wendy Edwards at her home in Bangalow.

Steven was keen to see something of our local area so Wendy took him to the Byron Bay lighthouse where he got a great view of our fabulous coastline. They also drove through the hinterland, stopping at Clunes for lunch.

Steven was impressed with the charm of Bangalow and its unique shops.



*Steven Miller and Wendy Edwards*



## April Post-Presentation Gathering

Following Steven Miller's excellent lecture, members and guests enjoyed drinks and a light supper to finish the evening on a high note.



Post-  
Presentation  
Gathering





## ArtsNational Conference

In lieu of Chair Cas Veriga who, but for the war in the Middle East would have been in Dubai, the ArtsNational Conference and 37<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting was attended by Vice Chair, Craig Snyder, Marion Pescud and Christine Bacon.

It was an excellent opportunity for us to better understand the aim and operation of our national society and to meet other members from around Australia in a very congenial environment.



Craig Snyder



Julia Gamble (Noosa), Claire Hewitt (Geelong) with Marion Pescud and Christine Bacon (Northern Rivers)

It was satisfying to note that Northern Rivers is operating under the best practices, and that we are innovative in our approach. However, we managed to collect some new ideas and tips which we look forward to introducing.

Marion Pescud

## Recommended Viewing

ArtsNational international lecturer Dr Sophie Oostervijk, has given us links to two very interesting programs. The first is a wonderful video tour of The Dolls' House of Petronella Oortman which is housed in the Rijksmuseum. It is narrated by Helena Bonham Carter.

The second is a lecture Sophie presented at Gresham College in London last December. Titled '*The Life, Death and Judgment in the Art and Times of Hieronymus Bosch*' the lecture is about the Dutch painter (who died in 1516) whose works mainly focuses on religious concepts and narratives.

We highly recommend both of these special presentations. Links:



Dr Sophie Oostervijk

- Petronella Oortman's Doll's House <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/dollshouse?ss=>
- Hieronymus Bosch Presentation <https://www.gresham.ac.uk/watch-now/hieronymus>

## Italian Art Heist

On 22<sup>nd</sup> March, brazen thieves took just three minutes to steal three masterpieces worth several million dollars when they broke through the front door of the Magnani Rocca Foundation, a private museum just outside Parma in Italy.

This follows a series of high-profile heists from major European museums, including a major jewel theft (worth over AU\$147.5 million) from the Louvre in Paris.



The stolen paintings: *Fish* by Auguste Renoir, *Still Life with Cherries* by Paul Cézanne and *Odalisque on the Terrace* by Henri Matisse.

✎ Marion Pescud

## Turner's Masterpiece Discovered

After a 54-year research journey, American artist Bill Arms, can finally boast that he owns a JMW Turner masterpiece. The painting, *View of Ancient Rome*, was acquired in 1970 from a friend of his mothers.

Arms spent over \$100,000 in forensic scientific tests and expert consultants. His own research included scholarship and historic records, and travel over three continents to unearth hundreds of related documents.



*View of Ancient Rome*, JMW Turner, circa 1807 - 1839

## Save the Dates!

**Monday 18 May – Presentation by David Worthington**

### **Damien Hirst and Contemporary Art**

Hirst, one of the most controversial of modern artists is reported to be the UK's wealthiest living artist. He dominated the 1990's art scene with his shocking works associated with death, including the 14' (4.3m) tiger shark preserved in formaldehyde and displayed in a clear case.



*Damien Hirst*

Hirst is reported to have said "I can't wait to get into a position to make really bad art and get away with it. At this moment if I did certain things people would look at it and then say 'fxxk off'. But after a while you can get away with things." Is this really where contemporary art is at?

What is going on in the contemporary art world when something like Hirst's dead shark can command such extraordinary prices? It also begs the question, is it art? As a contemporary sculptor working with abstract stone forms, David Worthington is well qualified to evaluate today's contemporary art scene. David has studied fine art in London, Barcelona and New York, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Sculptors. He and his wife Jane Fox, opened the Fox & Worthington Fine Art Gallery in Bridport, Dorset in 2013.



 Wendy Edwards



**Sunday 14 June – Presentation by Pieter DeVries**

### **The Space Shuttle: A Butterfly on a Rocket**

Space – the new frontier! From 1981 until its final mission in 2011, NASA's Space Shuttle Program galvanised our attention and had us dreaming of future space travel. Cinematographer Pieter de Vries' spectacular documentary provides us with a unique opportunity to experience the excitement and drama that leads many people to dream of travel beyond our planet Earth.

With unprecedented behind the scenes access, this riveting documentary shows rare personal scenes of the

people involved in the program, together with details of the technology and engineering brilliance that made these missions possible.

Pieter de Vries ACS has explored, by way of his camera, approximately two hundred of the most remote and exciting places and countries in the world. He has been the recipient of the Milli Award as Cinematographer of the Year and his films have won numerous awards including Emmys and BAFTAS.

#### **PLEASE NOTE**

**Different, Day Time and Venue for This Lecture Only**

Due to conflicting dates with Bangalow Film Festival, we had to find an alternative venue.

Not too far away – right next door!

**Moller Pavilion in the Bangalow Showgrounds.  
Sunday 14th June. Doors open at 3.30 for a 4pm start.**