



Newsletter 32 ♦ June 2026



Contents

- 2 From the Chair
with Cas Veriga
- 3 Bundanon: for artists and visitors alike
- 4 May Presentation:
Damien Hirst and Contemporary Art
- 6 Home-Hosting
May Raffle
May Post-Presentation Supper
- 7 The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
- 8 Tulips in Amsterdam
- 9 June Presentation:
*The Space Shuttle: a butterfly on a
rocket*
June Home-Hosts
- 10 A Jinx on Our House
June Post-Presentation Gathering
- 11 Artificial Intelligence: Friend or foe?
- 12 Save the Dates
Preview of July and August
Forthcoming presentations
- 13 Opulent Journeys Bonus Discount



From the Chair with Cas Veriga

Dear Members,

As we reach the halfway point of the year, it is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the many enriching experiences we have shared through Arts-National so far in 2026.

Our recent event featuring Pieter de Vries was a great success, attracting an enthusiastic audience and generating lively discussion. We thank all members and guests who attended and contributed to such an engaging and memorable occasion.

At this event we undertook a survey regarding your time preference for our presentations. Either 4pm on Monday or 6.30pm on Monday. Some of you have advised that you were not able to attend this event. I am happy to include your vote, but you must reply via email within a week to:

northernrivers@artsnational.au

You do not need to include your name just your time preference.

Looking ahead, we are delighted to invite you to our next lecture on 13 July. Acclaimed speaker Barry Venning will present a fascinating talk on Ai Weiwei, one of the world's most influential contemporary artists and cultural commentators. Barry's insightful exploration of Ai Weiwei's life, art, and activism promises to be both thought-provoking and inspiring.

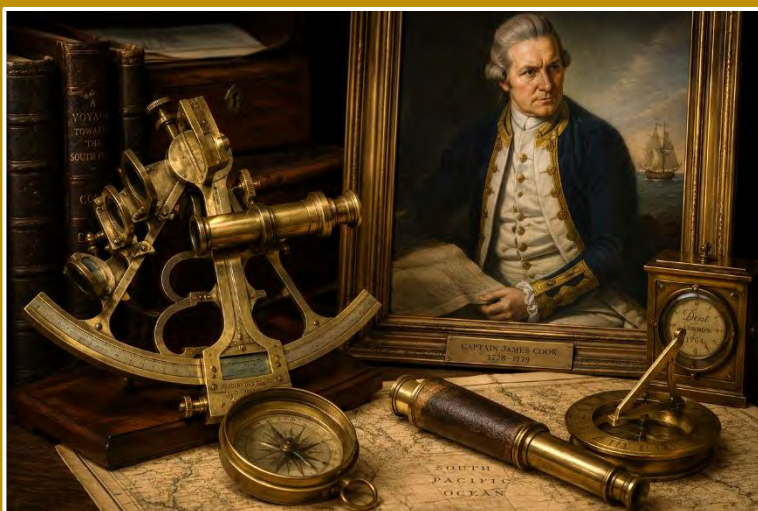


Cas Veriga

Our speaker, Barry Venning, is an art historian whose interests and teaching range from the art of late medieval Europe to global contemporary art. He has published books, articles and exhibition catalogue essays on Turner, Constable and European landscape painting, and also has an ongoing research interest in postcolonial art and British visual satire. He works as a consultant and associate lecturer for the Open University. His media work includes two BBC TV documentaries, radio appearances for BBC local radio and ABC Australia, and a DVD on Turner for the Tate.

We look forward to welcoming you to this exciting event and to sharing many more stimulating lectures and activities in the months ahead.

Cas Veriga



ARTSNATIONAL
Northern Rivers

Discover a world
where art, history,
science and
culture collide

Bundanon: for artists and visitors alike

It's not the easiest place to get to but what a landscape, what art, and what a gift! Situated on the magnificent Shoalhaven River on NSW's South Coast, *Bundanon* is the 2,700-acre property gifted by Arthur and Yvonne Boyd to the Australian people in 1993. Administered by the Bundanon Trust, it is described as a place for creativity and community inspired by the landscape. The property celebrates art and promotes the value of landscape in our lives.

Within a short drive of each other, the original 1866 Homestead and the much newer Bundanon Gallery are open to both artists and the public. The Homestead was a self-contained rural community until the tragic drowning of owner Kenneth Mackenzie and his daughter in 1922. The property then fell into decline and was subsequently bought in 1968 by art dealers Sandra and Michael Anthony McGrath and Francis McDonald who turned it into an artist retreat. Arthur and Yvonne Boyd bought the property in 1979. Many of the Boyd family were artistic and the Homestead is filled with paintings, pottery and sculptures by numerous family members. Arthur Boyd died in 1999 aged 78.

The Bundanon Gallery consists of The Bridge for Creative Learning and the Art Museum. The Bridge is spectacular narrow building measuring 160 mts long and 9 metres wide and is dramatically suspended above a gully, through which water sometimes flows.

The interior provides studios for visiting artists. Situated at the end of the Bridge, the Art Museum is buried within the sloping hillside. This provides protection for precious art works in the event of bush fires. Designed by Kerstin Thompson Architects, the design won the 2022 Sulman Medal and responds to current and future climatic conditions with inspiration drawn from rural Australia's trestle flood bridges.



Arthur Boyd's studio



'Shoalhaven River with Black Cockatoo'
Arthur Boyd

On show at the Art Museum/Gallery were works by Rosalie Gascoigne and Lorraine Connelly-Northey together with early teenage works by Arthur Boyd. The Boyd works showed clearly his early experimentation and the influences of the Heidelberg School and European Impressionists. Rosalie Gascoigne's *Clouds I and III* brought to mind the cloud paintings of Georgia O'keeffe, while the Connelly-Northey assemblages relate to the 'Narrbong' installation in the new wing of the Art Gallery of NSW.

May Presentation: Damien Hirst and Contemporary Art

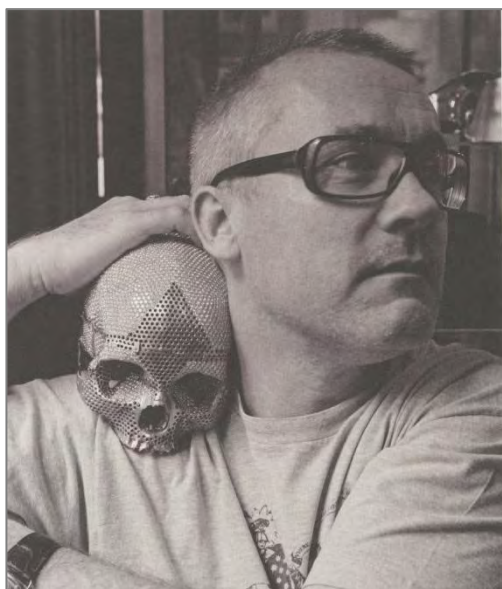
It had been raining heavily most of the day and was pelting down on the Monday evening when David Worthington was scheduled to give a talk to Arts National members. Despite the awful weather a surprisingly large crowd braved the elements to hear what was a fascinating talk about one of the world's most controversial contemporary artists.



David Worthington

While David Worthington, a sculptor, admitted that before preparing this talk, he only had a general knowledge of Damien Hirst and his work, David did however admit to the curiosity to better understand the phenomenon

of Damien Hirst. He also admitted that his sculptures and Damien's share a common approach by marrying street culture with modernist styles and this similarity allows for an appreciation of Hirst's work.



David Worthington

From a young age, Damien Hirst appears to have been a rebel and his studies at the Francis Davidson Art College (supported by the Hayward Gallery) exposed Hirst to a variety of influences including the collages of Kurt Schwitters. Further studies at the Goldsmiths Art School saw Hirst's continuing fascination with collage and the work of artists such as Duchamp, Donald Judd, Andy Warhol and conceptual art.

In the 1980's the Saatchi Gallery in London staged a major exhibition of American contemporary art.

These contemporary works, including work by Jeff

Koons and featured everyday objects, multiples and theatrical presentations, all novel ideas to the art world and exciting possibilities for the young Damien Hirst.

Still at art college, Hirst adopted this contemporary approach and after a certain amount of experimentation made the first of his dot paintings. These were to be the breakthrough for Hirst artistically and following a hugely successful exhibition while still in only his second year at collage, Hirst quickly became the newest contemporary artist to watch. Soon the outrageous darling of gallerists, celebrities, etc, and with the continuing support of Saatchi, Hirst didn't hesitate to shock audiences, albeit with a smile and the ability to command increasingly large sums of money for his work. As well as his 'dots', Hirst went on to continue with his themes of life and death by the use pharmaceutical products, boxes, butterflies and spin paintings. Nothing was out of bounds for curation and presentation as 'art' eg. Hirst's cow's head with live flies and maggots, "A Thousand Years (1990)". All these works, no matter how shocking, were beautifully made and presented.

Amongst Hirst most famous works were his 14-foot pickled tiger shark, "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living (1991)" and his diamond skull "For the Love of God", cast in platinum and encrusted with diamonds. The skull is valued at 15 million pounds. This 2007 last work, according to David Worthington, is credited as being the most important art work of the century.

After break of almost eight years, Hirst returned to the limelight with more controversial work that not only references antiquity and popular culture and includes underwater work for the Venice Biennale in 2017 and his Union Jack for the 2012 closing ceremony of the London Olympics.

Today Hirst is the UK's richest living artist. The success of Hirst's work is achieved by using the world around us to draw the viewer in so we become part of the theatre while

asking "who are we?" However, the question remains. Is this rebel, Hirst, having a clever joke at our expense or is his work such as the pickled shark really "art"?



✎ Wendy Edwards

Home-Hosting



David Worthington and Chick Wood

We have long espoused the merits of home-hosting – the opportunity to enjoy the company and conversation of a presenter with cultural/historic knowledge and experience. While personalities differ, you will be guaranteed an interesting and appreciative visitor.

Those who do provide accommodation to our guest lecturers, usually continue to do so – finding pleasure in the company and pride in showing off our beautiful region. What we haven't mentioned before is that often the host relationships turn into lasting friendships. Several of our members have caught up with their visitors while travelling abroad.

Hosting international presenter David Worthington in May, was long-time ArtsNational member Chick Wood.



Raffle Coordinator,
Erica Light

May Raffle

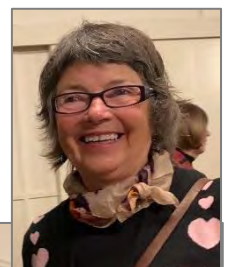
Diana Brewer was the happy winner of our May raffle. She received *On the Way to Work*, an electrifyingly candid book hailed as brave, unpredictable, scabrously funny and corrosively intelligent. It reveals Hirst's thoughts on celebrity, money, art, alcohol, sex, death, class, crime and cocaine.



May Post-Presentation Supper



As always, members and guests enjoyed refreshments following David Worthington's presentation.



The Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

After Dr Sophie Oosterwijk's wonderful ArtsNational presentation in August last year on the Rijksmuseum's decade-long restructure and the treasures it holds, I was determined to view the magnificent gallery and its collections on my next trip to Europe.

I have just done so, and the visit exceeded my expectations. The building is spectacular – with a whole new exhibition floor and the beautifully detailed interiors restored. The neo-gothic-renaissance style building was designed by Dutch architect Pierre Cuypers and completed in 1885. Since then, it has undergone several renovations and expansions.

One would need several days to view all the collections, so my husband Craig and I concentrated on our favourites; those being Medieval and Renaissance art, C18th and 19th Dutch art, and the Impressionists.



The Rijksmuseum from an Amsterdam canal



Craig Snyder in front of Rembrandt's replica painting

Rembrandt's *Nightwatch* takes pride of place in the Rijksmuseum's 'Gallery of Honour'. It is currently under restoration in situ and you can watch the conservators work from behind a glass wall. A life-size replica of the painting is situated nearby for those who want to examine its details.

The C18th and 19th works by Dutch masters are displayed in side galleries. Vermeer, and Van Gogh are heavily featured. Earlier works include paintings by Anthonis Mor, Frans Hals and Flemish artist, Peter Paul Rubens. To stand before the magnificent artworks was an awesome, almost emotional experience.

Although not yet into the full tourist season, the Rijksmuseum was quite crowded – however not enough to impede the viewing process. We purchased tickets on-line beforehand so were spared the long entry queues.

✉ Marion Pescud

Tulips in Amsterdam

One can't visit Amsterdam in the spring without visiting the Keukenhof Botanical Gardens which are bursting with over seven million flowering bulbs from mid-March to the beginning of May. The tulips are particularly magnificent – every shape and colour imaginable all laid out in beds between meandering paths, lawns, huge old trees, streams, lakes and fountains.

The flowerbeds are synchronised to ensure they bloom throughout the duration of park's eight-week opening. Three bulbs are planted in each location - the shallowest bulb will bloom first for three weeks, followed by the subsequent layers.



Marion Pescud at Keukenhof



Originally a 15th century kitchen garden for the Countess Jacoba van Beieren, Keukenhof finally evolved into a public spring flower park in 1950. It is now one of the world's largest and most famous flower gardens and a showcase for the Dutch flower industry. The park is immaculately manicured and the garden design a triumph of botanical art.

Each year Keukenhof also has a temporary art exhibition. This year it featured 70 sculptures and other works created by 18 national and international artists.

Keukenhof is just 25 km from Amsterdam. If you don't have a car, there are several tours available from the city. With approximately 1.4 million visitors a year, the best idea would be to purchase tickets or a tour on-line.





June Presentation: The Space Shuttle: A butterfly on a Rocket

Our June presentation was an exception to our normal offerings. The event was scheduled in an alternate venue, a different day and time, and the topic was a first for our society.

Our guest speaker was Pieter de Vries, a leading documentary cinematographer and Sony Imaging Ambassador, who has won numerous awards including several Emmys and BAFTAs, and the Australian Cinematographer Society's top Award. Based in Australia, he spends much of his time traveling, working on documentary programs for many international organisations. During a career



Pieter De Vries



spanning four decades, Pieter has shot in around one hundred and eighty-five countries, including the Arctic, the Antarctic, the Galapagos Islands, and in space – which resulted in his brilliant documentary, *The Space Shuttle: A butterfly on a Rocket*.

The presentation traced NASA's Space Shuttle program from its ambitious start to its final missions. The 12-week film shoot at Cape Canaveral and Mission Control in Houston allowed unprecedented access to the Space Shuttle, Endeavour – a privilege never-before granted.



June Home-Hosts

Dianne and James Stuart had the pleasure of hosting our June guest speaker Pieter De Vries who presented his brilliant documentary on NASA's Space Shuttle Program.

Dianne and James found Pieter's company easy, enjoyable and very interesting.

Left: Pieter De Vries with Dianne and James Stuart



A Jinx on Our House

With a well-executed plan, a project usually draws to a satisfactory conclusion, but sometimes a gripe of gremlins can interfere and the best-laid processes can go awry. And so it was with Pieter De Vries' presentation *'The Space Shuttle: a butterfly on a rocket'*.

- The A&I Hall, after years of our standing requirement was double booked and a new and suitable venue had to be found.
- The new scheduling meant we had to compete with other events and sporting fixtures.
- The bus transporting Pieter was cancelled and so hasty pick-up had to be employed.
- The sound system malfunctioned requiring some exterior advice and magic tape.
- Our raffle coordinator was in Sydney so the task of delivering the prize was allotted to Craig Snyder and Marion Pescud. Unfortunately, they were both engaged in a medical emergency, so the prize remained securely at their house.

With several committee members away, those that were there really stepped up as did several of our members. The dedication of our team is quite extraordinary and under the calm guidance of Cas Veriga the afternoon was a success,

To take the edge off any raffle disappointment, we are going to offer the book *Space Shuttle: A Photographic Journey* as a prize at next month's raffle. This means you will have a double chance of winning a magnificent book for the same donation.



June Post-Presentation Gathering



Members and guests enjoyed a late afternoon tea following Pieter De Vries' presentation.



Artificial Intelligence: Friend or foe?

Recently, an image of a Monet painting purported to be created by artificial intelligence (AI) was posted on social media with a request for viewers to list details of what made it inferior to the real thing. There were hundreds of respondents with comments from criticising the colours to one who stated, "It looks nothing like a Monet."

The thing is, the image was real! It was from one of Monet's famous Water Lilies series. Sadly, living in a world of fake news and algorithm generated content, we are confused about what is real and what is false – and now that has spread through to the domain of art. AI has infiltrated creative industries and continues to grow exponentially across all art forms. But why does it matter?

Forgeries have existed since man first drew in the dirt with a stick. Sometimes they have been indistinguishable from the original, occasionally even superior, however when the pretence is exposed their value plummets to almost nothing.



AI generated graphic by Marion Pescud

According to writer Will Bennett, we don't value art for its accuracy, resolution or technique. We treasure it because it is cultural history, created by intention and by artists producing a subject through their specific lens and mindset. This is something AI can never do. No matter how impressive the output, it will always be just a forgery.

But back to my question of friend or foe – it is both! It can be confusing, misleading and at times dangerous. What we really need to be concerned about is 'Artificial General Intelligence' that equals or surpasses human capacity. Scientists and creators are concerned that we are about to tip over the edge into that chasm where AI programs enhance their own performance until humans lose control.

I admit that I love AI. While I'm aware of its misuse, I'm in awe of its power. I have used AI for many things, including planning holidays, but my favourite is requesting the creation of images to accompany the notices I design to promote ArtsNational Northern Rivers.

So, while some of us lean into AI, we will always care more about what other humans create – where their struggle, joy, ambition and grief is expressed and absorbed into other human consciousness. AI can replicate art, but its output has no moral soul.

✉ Marion Pescud

Save the Dates!

Monday 18 July – Presentation by Barry Venning

Who's Afraid of Ai Weiwei:

Repression and Resistance in Recent Chinese Art

Openly criticising the Chinese Government has always been a risky business but it hasn't stopped Chinese artist Ai Weiwei from not only producing artworks that both challenge authority but also explore the links between the contemporary art world and traditional Chinese culture.

His activism arose as a result of the exile of his father, together with the family, to a labour camp in remote northwestern China when Ai Weiwei was only one year old. The family were to spend 16 years in exile, returning to Beijing in 1976 and Ai Weiwei is said to have said "exile was a whirlpool that swallowed up my father, upended my life too, leaving a mark on me that I carry to this day".

The Arts National's July lecture by Barry Venning will look at the extraordinary artistic activism of this Chinese artist. Someone who has not been hesitant to openly criticise a government regardless of Ai Weiwei being kept under heavy surveillance, his movements restricted and even being jailed for 81 days. The official Chinese State media, described Ai Weiwei as a "deviant and a plagiarist". None of these deterrents have curbed Ai Weiwei's provocations.

July's lecturer is Barry Venning, an English art historian with considerable experience in artistic subjects that range from medieval European art until global contemporary works. Barry is a consultant and associate lecturer for Open University, the author of a number of books and also appears in both radio and television documentaries.



Sunday 10 August – Presentation by James Renshaw

Pompeii and Herculaneum:

Reconstructing the Final Day

It was a beautiful summer's day in AD79 as the Roman residents of Pompeii and Herculaneum went about their daily lives in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius. Twelve hours later most of the 20,000 citizens were dead and over the next two days, Pompeii and nearby Herculaneum were buried by deadly ash flows. Mount Vesuvius had erupted spewing a hot avalanche of rock, ash and deadly gases down the volcano's flank, enveloping the city below. Over the next two days Pompeii was 'buried alive'.

The August ArtsNational lecture by James Renshaw will examine the archaeology, volcanology, literary evidence and art that illustrate this catastrophe. In the meantime, the ruins operate as a major UNESCO World Heritage site, attracting thousand, of visitors while a million people live within the range of this active volcano that could again erupt catastrophically.

James Renshaw has a degree in Classics from Oxford University and has taught classics at secondary school level. He currently teaches at Godolphin and Latymer, an independent secondary girls' school in London. James has also published a number of text books associated with the classical world.

Wendy Edwards



Opulent
JOURNEYS

Journeys that Take
You to Far Horizons

Opulent Journeys are offering a special bonus on their Japanese Art, Gardens and Culture Tour from 20th November – 5th December 2026.

Every ArtsNational, Northern Rivers member will receive \$200 discount off the listed price of the tour, on booking.

**\$200
discount**



Be sure to mention that you are an ArtsNational Member to get your benefits and spread the word to your friends to receive this special offer.

Claire Kelly writes:

For me the most exciting experiences related to the lesser acknowledged (in the West) craft forms of Japanese art. On the shores of Lake Hakone, we visited a wood carving workshop making exquisite wooden boxes and other artefacts using traditional tools and techniques. Paper making is also a long-honoured tradition and we were taught about its art and history. Kyoto was a treasure trove of pottery making where we were able to observe kilns that had been operating for decades with potters still producing delicate objects with stunning glazes. Kyoto's Museum of Crafts and Design is dedicated to the maintenance and continuation of local crafts. A well-rounded trip enabling each of us to explore our areas of interest in art supported by tour leader Kim Woods Rabbidge. Kim Woods Rabbidge is a member of ArtsNational Northern Rivers.

Please contact Opulent Journeys for full itineraries and to make bookings:
<https://opulentjourneys.com.au/>