

## **Ted Gott testimony**

The 2018 ICOM Award for outstanding individual achievement recognises Dr Ted Gott and his commitment to the visual arts, scholarship and international museum relations.

The Award acknowledges Ted's significant contribution to Australia's cultural life nationally and internationally including highly acclaimed exhibitions, research, publications, mentoring of developing curators and ongoing commitment to the profession.

Ted would have to be considered Australia's pre-eminent curator in international art. His experience, attention to detail, knowledge of art and history, scholarly approach and easy communication style has seen many significant exhibitions developed and presented to Australian audiences that have enchanted and enlightened academic and general audiences alike.

Ted is currently Senior Curator, International Art at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) and an Honorary Fellow in the School of Culture and Communication, The University of Melbourne. He commenced his career as Curator of Prints and Drawings at the NGV, and has held roles as Curator at the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) and Senior Curator at Heide Museum of Modern Arts.

Following his doctoral research on the French Symbolist artist Odilon Redon, awarded from the University of Melbourne in 1987, Ted continued his education at the British Museum, Northwestern University and the Art Institute of Chicago. His doctorate was in the field of international art, and he has fostered and maintained international connections and interests in his professional career ever since.

Ted has been committed to working in museums and galleries, developing outstanding exhibitions. He has curated and co-curated over 26 exhibitions, including *The Impressionists: Masterpieces from the Musée d'Orsay* (2004), *Kiss of the Beast: From Paris Salon to King Kong* (2005), *Modern Britain 1900-1960* (2007), *Salvador Dalí: Liquid Desire* (2009), *Gustave Moreau and the Eternal Feminine* (2010), *Napoleon: Revolution to Empire* (2012), *Radiance: The Neo-Impressionists* (2012), *Degas: A New Vision* (2016), and *Van Gogh and the Seasons* (2017). He has published widely on Australian, British and French art, and in 2013 co-authored a cultural history of the gorilla in nineteenth and twentieth-century art, literature, scientific discourse and cinema (*Gorilla*, Reaktion Press, London).

Each of the exhibitions Ted has curated has seen him look into a 'new' way of viewing art in its context, often bringing a totally new vision to what may be a well-known period of art history. Ted says of his work: 'The common thread is this love that I have in finding strange stories that come out of looking at art, and then putting these stories together in a way, whether it be a lecture, or an article, or an exhibition, that I can share with other people'.

In the early 1990s Ted was Curator of European Art at the National Gallery of Australia (NGA). *Surrealism: Revolution by night*, co-curated with Michael Lloyd and Christopher Chapman for the NGA in 1993, sought to cast a new light on Surrealism. Ted, for example in his essay 'Lips of coral: sex and violence in Surrealism', wrote fearlessly about the implicit violent undercurrent in many artworks, an area into which few academics had ventured. The exhibition travelled to major institutions, and Ted enthusiastically lectured on it in many regional areas.

In 1994 Ted curated the exhibition *Don't leave me this way: art in the age of AIDS* for the NGA. At the time it was the largest exhibition on the subject of HIV/AIDS to be staged in Australia, and the first exhibition on this subject to be held at a National Gallery anywhere in the world. The companion book presented essays, poems, paintings, sculpture, poster art, and photographs by Derek Jarman, Cindy Sherman, Edmund White, and others exploring the effect of AIDS on art around the world. At

the time there was a lot of fear associated with HIV/AIDS, and it was a difficult exhibition to develop, with many of the artists being ill or having died. *Don't leave me this way* was estimated to attract an audience of around 10,000 people. Such was Ted's sensitivity to audience interest and his vision that 140,000 people attended.

In Ted's collaborative exhibitions he works with colleagues in complementary disciplines to expand the curatorial breadth and visitor experience. For *Kiss of the beast: from Paris Salon to King Kong* Ted collaborated with Kathryn Weir, Curatorial Manager, International Art and Australian Cinémathèque at Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art. The exhibition was shown at Queensland Art Gallery and the film program at ACMI in 2005. For *Kiss of the beast*, Ted and Kathryn selected historic and contemporary versions of 'the beast', juxtaposing sculpture, painting and film, 'high' art and popular culture. The exhibition examined our highly charged relationship with primates, leading the viewer to make connections to ideas of evolution, race, aesthetics and sex.

In 2016, Ted received a Knighthood from the French Government for services to French culture, *The Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* (Order of Arts and Letters). The insignia was presented by His Excellency M. Christophe Lecourtier, Ambassador of France, in a ceremony which took place at Alliance Francaise, St Kilda. *The Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* is an Order of France, established on 2 May 1957 by the Minister of Culture. Its purpose is the recognition of significant contributions to the arts, literature, or the propagation of these fields. Its origin is attributed to the Order of Saint-Michel (established 1 August 1469) as acknowledged by French government sources.

This ICOM award recognises the work Ted has undertaken with many international museums to curate exhibitions, and liaise with international colleagues to bring collections to Australia. He has contributed significant scholarship to diverse artists such as Emmanuel Fremiet, Stanley Spencer, Keith Haring, Louis Duffy and Ex de Medici to name a few. His generosity with his knowledge makes him respected and revered both internationally and here in Australia.