

Anti-colonial Australian works among new acquisitions made by Tate and Museum of Contemporary Art Australia

Joint programme will see pieces by artists such as Helen Johnson and Richard Bell shared between London and Sydney

by Gareth
Harris 19 May



Richard Bell's Embassy (2013) (Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane)

The Tate in London and Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA) have acquired five works, including three paintings by the emerging Melbourne-born artist Helen Johnson, as part of a joint acquisition programme backed by Qantas, Australia's national airline. Five pieces by Australian artists were also acquired last year under the initiative.

The new joint acquisitions include three paintings by Johnson (*Seat of Power*, 2016; *Bad Debt*, 2016; and *A Feast of Reason and a Flow of Soul*, 2016), an installation by Richard Bell (*Embassy*, 2013-ongoing) and a video by Peter Kennedy made in collaboration with John Hughes (*On Sacred Land*, 1983-84).



Helen Johnson's A Feast of Reason and a Flow of Soul (2016)
(Courtesy of the artist and Chateau Shatto, Los Angeles; © the artist)

Johnson's work focuses on the complex postcolonial relationship between Australia and the UK. She says in a statement: "Addressing, as [the three paintings] do, the depredations of British colonial culture in Australia, and some ways in which we perpetuate it, it feels appropriate for these works to be entering the shared custodianship of the MCA in Sydney and the Tate in London."

The initiative was launched in 2015. All of the acquisitions will first be displayed at the MCA and then travel to Tate. During the first round of acquisitions last year, both institutions gained works by Susan Norrie, Vernon Ah Kee, Gordon Bennett and Judy Watson. Tate Modern is due to show two of the works in August: Norrie's *Transit* (2011) and Bennett's *Possession Island (Abstraction)*, 1991. The second round of acquisitions will be shown at MCA next year.

"[The programme] was made possible through a A\$2.8m (\$2.1m) corporate gift from the Qantas Foundation to increase the international profile of contemporary Australian art as part of the national carrier's role of championing Australia," a MCA spokeswoman says.