Fred Williams in the You Yangs

Learn resource

Fred Williams
You Yangs landscape 1963
oil and tempera on composition board
The Wesfarmers Collection, Perth
© Estate of Fred Williams
Photographer: Robert Frith

Geelong
Gallery
Little Malop Street
Geelong 3220
T +61 3 5229 3645

geelonggallery.org.au/learn
Fred Williams in the You Yangs

Introduction
Fred Williams in the You Yangs brings together the ground-breaking images that represent the turning point in Fred Williams’s art. Williams started working in the You Yangs in 1962. It is his work of this period that defined what is commonly considered his ‘classic’ interpretation of the Australian landscape. This exhibition reveals Williams’s enduring fascination with the You Yangs as a recurring subject (among others) for his painting throughout the 1960s to the late 1970s, and surveys in marvellous depth his working method.

Students and educators are encouraged to use this resource as a starting point to explore important themes and ideas of the exhibition and to ask questions that generate discussions in the classroom and the Gallery.

The resource is directed towards Levels 9 to VCE, although learning activities can be adapted by educators to suit all learning levels. The discussion questions, research topics and activities in this resource seek to promote visual analysis and foster critical and creative thinking. The learning material also presents links to understanding and connect to the priorities of the Victorian Curriculum.

About Geelong Gallery
Geelong Gallery was established in 1896 and is one of Australia’s leading and oldest regional art galleries. The Gallery holds a magnificent collection of 19th, 20th and 21st century Australian and European painting, sculpture, printmaking, photography and decorative arts. The Gallery has important holdings of 18th and 19th century British, Irish and Welsh porcelain, and colonial Australian silver. The historical collection has been developed with a special focus on early images of the Geelong region, an exemplar of which is Eugene von Guérard’s 1856 masterpiece View of Geelong. The Gallery’s outstanding collection of over 6000 works includes many works of national significance such as Frederick McCubbin’s A bush burial, 1890. The collection is a valuable learning resource for all students and educators.

Curriculum links
— students learn as artist and as audience
— students learn through making and responding

Learning areas
The Arts (Visual arts)
Explore and Express Ideas
Levels 7 to 10
Students investigate ways in which the artist Fred Williams explored, developed and expressed ideas, concepts and themes in his visual arts practice.

Visual Arts Practices
Levels 7 to 10
Students explore and manipulate different materials, techniques, visual conventions and processes used by Fred Williams in work produced throughout the 1960s and 1970s inspired by the You Yangs. Students develop their own individual artistic intention when creating and responding to the environment.

Present and Perform
Levels 7 to 10
Students plan their own artworks, exploring different ideas and visual conventions as part of their response to works included in this resource. Students manipulate different materials and techniques to communicate their own ideas and intentions in their work.

Respond and Interpret
Levels 7 to 10
Students analyse, evaluate and interpret artworks included in this resource and consider the different historical and cultural contexts.

Victorian Certificate of Education: Unit 4: Studio practice and art industry contexts
Interview with Jason Smith, curator of Fred Williams in the You Yangs. Students understand the methods and intentions of public art galleries in exhibiting artworks.
23 January 1927
born in Richmond, Melbourne

1943–47
studies at the National Gallery School, Melbourne

1946–50
studies at the George Bell School, Melbourne

1951
first exhibition at Stanley Coe Gallery in Melbourne with fellow artists Ian Armstrong and Harry Rosengrave

1952–56
in London. He works as a framer and takes evening classes in painting and life drawing at the Chelsea School of Art. He studies intaglio printing techniques at the Central School of Arts and Crafts.

1957
returns to Melbourne in February. He sights the You Yangs from the deck of the ship Iberia on which he is sailing home to Melbourne from London.

1957
holds his first solo exhibition at Australian Galleries, Melbourne

1957
commences painting landscape images around Mittagong, New South Wales

1958–59
series of forest and waterhole motifs in landscape works inspired by Sherbrooke, Victoria

1961
marries Lyn Watson and moves to Park Street, South Yarra

1962
first working excursion to the You Yangs with James Mollison, and first You Yangs gouache works on paper completed. Moves with family to Chrystobel Crescent, Hawthorn, where a new studio enables the production of larger paintings.

The You Yangs made a lasting and powerful impression on Williams, and fired in him a certain environmental politics. He was concerned by the impact of industrial and urban development around the range, and his diaries into the mid-1970s note his anxiety and anger in relation to what he saw as major threats to the preservation of the range.

1963–64
a period of intense creative activity in which the first major series of You Yangs paintings and etchings is realised

1963
moves to Upwey in the Dandenong Ranges, Victoria

1963
awarded the Helena Rubinstein Travelling Art Scholarship, Williams's first major prize. Three of the five paintings submitted include You Yangs I, II and III. Winning the Scholarship brings Williams's new You Yangs works to national attention. He starts to keep daily diaries in which he not only records thoughts and engagements, but thumbnail sketches of works in progress.

1963
paints the gouache Knoll in the You Yangs I. James Mollison has noted that Williams had one favourite knoll to which he returned. The etchings of the subject proceed through 1963 and 1964. The 1965 painting, regarded as the completion of the first You Yangs series, is based on these earlier works.
## Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>wins the Wynne Prize for landscape painting, Art Gallery of New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>publication of <em>Fred Williams: Etchings</em>, a comprehensive catalogue by James Mollison of Williams’s etchings produced and printed between 1954 and 1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Williams’s work is the subject of his first major museum exhibition <em>Heroic landscape: Streeton – Williams</em> at the National Gallery of Victoria. Williams was an admirer of Arthur Streeton and Tom Roberts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Williams’s paintings on paper are the subject of a significant survey <em>Fred Williams watercolours</em>, Newcastle City Art Gallery</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>invited to exhibit in the first Biennale of Sydney</td>
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<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 April 1982</td>
<td>dies at Hawthorn, Melbourne, after a brief illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>publication of first major monograph <em>Fred Williams 1927–1982</em> by Patrick McCaughey, Bay Books, Sydney. Williams is the subject of a major solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Williams is the subject of a comprehensive retrospective curated by James Mollison at the Australian National Gallery (now National Gallery of Australia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>publication of <em>A Singular Vision: The Art of Fred Williams</em> by James Mollison, Australian National Gallery</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>publication of <em>Fred Williams: Infinite Horizons</em> to accompany the major retrospective curated by Deborah Hart, National Gallery of Australia</td>
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**Geelong Gallery**

Fred Williams in the You Yangs  
19 August to 5 November 2017  
Learn resource  
geelonggallery.org.au/learn

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Fred Williams 1981  
Photographer: Rennie Ellis  
© Rennie Ellis/Pictures collection, State Library of Victoria.
Fred Williams in the You Yangs

Photographer: David Moore

© Lisa, Michael, Matthew and Joshua Moore
Fred Williams in the You Yangs

I am basically an artist who sees things in terms of paint.¹

Fred Williams in the You Yangs is an extensive representation of the oil paintings, gouaches, drawings, and prints Fred Williams (1927–1982) produced between 1962 and 1978, inspired by the You Yangs landscape twenty-two kilometres north of Geelong. Williams drew and painted on paper in situ during repeated excursions, using visual material produced on site, at the source, for the large-scale paintings and numerous etchings he produced with enormous consideration and aesthetic control back in his studio, or in a printmaking workshop.

Williams’s art school training and studies in tonal painting, and his receptivity to modernist approaches was allied to an enquiring mind and deep understanding of the traditions and discipline of painting. He had a determination and eventual confidence to develop an idiosyncratic and complex painterly language with which he would redefine how an Australian landscape could be painted and seen: in resolutely abstract terms, yet powerfully recognised by viewers as quintessentially of Australia. (Jason Smith, Fred Williams in the You Yangs, exh. cat., Geelong Gallery, 2017, p. 6, and subsequent italicised quotes)

Activities
As a class discuss your response to the painting You Yang pond, 1963. What were you drawn to first when you viewed this work?

Compare the painting You Yang pond, 1963, to an earlier work on paper Pond in the You Yangs, 1962. How has the artist achieved a sense of distance or perspective in each of the works? How has the artist’s perspective and visual language evolved?

Take a series of photographs of elements and patterns that you can see in an urban landscape as a source of inspiration. Develop and enlarge one of the photographs and create a painting that translates the various lines, shapes, textures and patterns in the photographic image.

Fred Williams in the You Yangs

Fred Williams

Pond in the You Yangs 1962
watercolour, gouache, charcoal and coloured pencil
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of James Mollison, 1996
Photographer: Nicholas Umek
© Estate of Fred Williams
Fred Williams
You Yang pond 1963
oil on composition board
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
Gift of Godfrey Phillips International Pty Ltd, 1968
Photographer: Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
© Estate of Fred Williams
In Australia there is no focal point. Obviously, it was too good a thing for me to pass up. If there’s going to be no focal point in a landscape, then it had to build into paint. 4

‘You Yang’ derives from the local Indigenous names Wurdi Youang or Ude Youang, one proposed translation of which is ‘big mountain in the middle of a plain’, or ‘big or large hill’. The You Yang range is an ancient site in Wadawurrung country and specific to the Yaawangi clan group. It is a place that continues to be of deep significance to its traditional owners. The granite peaks retain evidence of Indigenous water gathering and storage ‘wells’, and today the Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative works to ensure the maintenance of the You Yangs’ rich natural and cultural heritage. (p. 8)

Williams’s routine in the You Yangs was to arrive, survey the weather, and determine a location from which he wished to draw. The first You Yangs gouaches from 1962 are generally conventional in their observation of the geographical and spatial characteristics of the landscape, and are either views from the height of Big Rock, or locations where he is able to look into the middle distance to concentrate on specific features of a hillside. The expanse beyond promoted the abstraction. (p. 14)

Activities

Discuss the compositional techniques used by Williams in the painting You Yangs landscape, 1963. As a viewer, what effect does the composition have on your sense of space?

What feelings, moods, or ideas does the artist communicate to you about the landscape and environment in this artwork? Discuss in groups.

The Australian landscape has had an aesthetic, cultural and spiritual importance for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Research Aboriginal artist Rover Thomas and compare how he and Williams have each used observation, visual elements, and pictorial principles to communicate their personal, or cultural and social connections to the environment.

Find a location to complete a series of studies of the environment using gouache or ink. Record your drawings in your visual diary and annotate your process; recording the time of day and any seasonal changes you observe. Focus on areas of different size and scale; choose a high vantage point, a wide vista, smaller areas of interest and details on the ground. Choose one of the compositions and further develop as a finished work of art.
Fred Williams
You Yangs (1963)
gouache
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of the HJ Heinz II Charitable and Family Trust, Governor, and the Utah Foundation, Fellow, 1980
Photographer: Predrag Cancar
© Estate of Fred Williams
The landscape

When I came back to Australia I looked at the landscape and I did see that there was something that I wanted to say. It became obsessive with me.7

During his London years, Williams had worked primarily with the human figure. Upon his return in 1957, he set about to reconnect artistically and intellectually with the Australian landscape. After an absence of five years he saw his home country with fresh eyes. He decided to tackle the landscape subject, and in the process would contribute fundamentally to a renewal in Australian landscape painting, and its recuperation from a malaise of hackneyed, nationalistic, and sentimental images of ‘the bush’ and the gumtree that simply reproduced familiar scenes bordering on the meaningless. (p. 12)

Art movements

Williams’s work in the You Yangs is a key turning point in his art, and in his development of a highly original pictorial space in the history of Australian landscape painting. It initiates what we understand as classical Fred Williams, or what we see as ‘Williams country’. (p. 6)

Between 1957 and 1962 he painted landscapes that drew on his refined sense of pictorial structure and classical order, and on the lessons of Cézanne and the cubists, abstracting from the real in order to create pictorial spaces of relevance, of meaning, and of feeling. (p. 12)

Activities

The Australian landscape has been a central focus and inspiration for many Australian artists. Search the Geelong Gallery’s collection online and identify an artwork that would make an interesting comparison in how another artist represents or responds to the landscape in comparison to Fred Williams. What ideas does each artwork communicate about the landscape and environment? Discuss and compare the historical context and formal qualities of each of the artworks.

Discuss what you imagine Williams’s personal feeling, mood or thinking was when creating You Yangs landscape, 1963. As a viewer what are your own interpretations of this work? How do you feel this might be influenced by your own life experience, or connection to the landscape? Discuss.

Research the rise of abstraction in the 1950s and 1960s in Australia. Discuss the style, techniques and influences of the movement in relation to the works included in the resource.

Compare and contrast the painting You Yangs III, 1963, to a landscape painting by the French artist Paul Cézanne. Discuss exploring the artistic influences, cultural contexts, and interpretation of subject matter, media and techniques.

Examine You Yangs III, 1963, and discuss the visual conventions the artist has used to ‘create pictorial spaces of relevance, of meaning, and of feeling’ in the painting? Analyse and evaluate in groups using formal elements such as colour, line and composition.

Closely examine the painting You Yangs landscape, 1963, and write a letter to a friend or a special person in your life describing what you see in the painting. Use language that reveals you are evaluating, decoding and interpreting the work as a personal response.
Fred Williams
You Yangs landscape 1963
oil and tempera on composition board
The Wesfarmers Collection, Perth
Photographer: Robert Frith
© Estate of Fred Williams
Materials, techniques and processes

The range of reviews by leading art critics and commentators writing in the early to late 1960s are generally objective and highly perceptive evaluations of Williams's aesthetic, formal and technical developments and capacities as an artist delivering a fresh vision of landscape. They remain records of persuasive and astute advocacy for the contribution the You Yangs pictures made to Australian art in a lineage from Roberts and Streeton, through Nolan and Drysdale, to Williams. (p. 17)

The breakthrough moment of the first series of You Yangs paintings, and Williams’s subsequent interpretations, versions, and variations of the landscape, were supported by an interdisciplinary art practice. He had an innate fascination with media and processes. Drawing, painting, and printmaking occurred in tandem, and with equal importance in his eyes. He routinely worked on the same subject in different media, as the various versions of Knoll in the You Yangs … attest. (p. 6–7)

Printmaking practice

I have always thought etching was a very important medium, a major medium, simply because it can be altered and changed and pushed and shoved the way oil painting can.13

While in London in 1954, Williams studied the techniques of intaglio printing – the full range of distinct processes that are generally grouped under the term ‘etching’ – at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. He adopted the basic techniques quickly and embarked on the production of a vast printed oeuvre, the first comprehensively detailed catalogue of which was assembled by James Mollison from 1961 and published in 1968. (p. 18)

Williams’s printmaking methods and approach to the You Yangs subject as a rich source for image-making is comprehensively tackled in the three versions of Knoll in the You Yangs … made in 1963 and 1964, in which the original plate has been cut up after the final edition to produce two new landscapes from its details. (p. 18)

Activities

Compare the two versions of Knoll in the You Yangs, included in this resource. Analyse and evaluate the stylistic, technical, expressive and aesthetic features of each artwork.

Williams stated in an interview with the artist and critic James Gleeson that he learnt how to apply dynamic symmetry during his studies at the George Bell School. Research the compositional technique known as dynamic symmetry. Discuss how Williams has applied this technique in works included in this resource.

Printmaking in Australia had a remarkable creative resurgence in the 1960s. In 1966 the Print Council of Australia was formed and Fred Williams was a founding member. Research the many factors that contributed to the revival of printmaking in Australia in the 1960s.

Williams experimented with a wide range of traditional materials such as charcoal, watercolour, oil paint and gouache. Explore a range of drawing techniques and materials to develop a series of images using the same subject matter for inspiration. Annotate your development in your visual diary.

Explore a range of mark-making techniques using gouache on paper that will form the basis of an abstract etching composition. Create a number of prints manipulating a variety of visual effects.
Fred Williams

Knoll in the You Yangs 1965
oil on canvas
Private collection, Melbourne
Photographer: Andrew Curtis
© Estate of Fred Williams
Glossary of printmaking terms

Knoll in the You Yangs and You Yangs pond, 1963, are prints in which Williams has used multiple printmaking techniques listed below

**Intaglio printing**
Intaglio printing processes include engraving, etching, aquatint, drypoint and mezzotint. Intaglio is an overall term applied to these processes whereby the surface of the plate has been scratched, incised, or corroded. Ink is deposited into these indentations (or grooves) and the surface of the plate is wiped clean: ‘plate tone’ refers to areas where an artist intentionally retains ink on the surface of the plate. The inked plate and a damp sheet of paper are run through a printing press: the pressure applied by the press’ rollers forces the damp paper into the inked grooves of the plate resulting in an impression. Each of the intaglio processes described below are printed in this manner. A visible plate mark (around the edge of the image) is a defining feature of intaglio printing.

**Engraving**
The process of lines being cut directly into a metal plate using a tool called a burin. Ink is then applied to the plate and wiped back, leaving the ink in the engraved lines.

**Etching**
A process of scratching lines through a wax-covered or tar-covered metal plate which is then placed in acid. The acid eats into the exposed scratched areas to form grooves. The plate is wiped clean to remove the wax or tar covering, and ink is then applied to the plate and wiped clean, leaving ink in the grooves.

**Aquatint**
A technique used to create large areas of tone using a layer of powdered resin applied to a plate: the resin is acid resistant. When the plate is heated the resin melts and fixes to the plate. The plate is then bitten with acid that eats the areas of the metal plate that have been left uncovered. The resin is removed and the plate is inked. Darker tones are etched into the plate in stages: the longer the plate is left in acid, the deeper the indentations which results in a darker tone when printed.

**Drypoint**
A design is cut into a plate using a tool called a drypoint needle. A distinctive feature of a drypoint is the velvety (or fuzzy) quality of the printed line: caused by the pooling of ink in the rough edge a drypoint needle creates on the plate (this rough edge is known as the “burr”).
Fred Williams
*You Yangs pond* (1967)
gouache
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of the HJ Heinz II Charitable and Family Trust, Governor, and the Utah Foundation, Fellow, 1980
Photographer: Garry Sommerfeld
© Estate of Fred Williams
Unit 4:
Studio practice and art industry contexts:
Interview with Jason Smith, curator of Fred Williams in the You Yangs

Can you discuss the intention/curatorial rationale behind the exhibition Fred Williams in the You Yangs?

As one of the most important artists of the twentieth century for whom our local landscape had been such a powerful influence, it seemed right to me that Geelong Gallery should focus in-depth on this one significant series in Williams’s oeuvre.

What were some of the curatorial considerations in the exhibition design?

Williams’s works require ‘breathing space’. We have been careful in our selection of works to ensure we do not crowd the exhibition space.

What methods were used in considering the conservation of the artworks?

The majority of works are framed paintings or works on paper and simply require handling to museum standards. A number of gouaches were unframed and these require the Gallery to mount (with acid-free mountboard) and frame them in the Gallery’s standard-sized temporary frames.

Lighting: Paintings can tolerate higher lux levels – 200–350 lux – than works on paper, which will be displayed under 35–50 lux level. Consideration is given to combining or separating these works so that viewers’ perception of light is not unsettled by dramatic variations within an exhibition.

Temperature: Temperature and humidity levels are best kept at 20–22°C and 50–55% +/- 5%. It is important that humidity does not fluctuate sharply in short periods of time as this has a negative impact on the expansion and contraction of either the paper fibre or cotton weave supports for gouache and oil, among other media.

Transportation: Works are transported crated in climate-controlled, dedicated art transport vehicles. Liaison is required between the Gallery, public and private owners, and the transport company to ensure that all conditions are met – including condition reporting, insurance, and whether the work is of such value it must be accompanied by a courier.

When the works have been identified and their owners agree to lend them to the exhibition, the owners are sent loan forms to formalize the agreement and provide conditions of loan that effectively ensure the proper handling of the works from wall to wall.

The works need to be covered by insurance in transit as well as in situ and, with major exhibitions, this is undertaken through the State Government Indemnification Scheme, which assumes the premium costs that would otherwise fall to the Gallery. Without Government support it would be impossible to afford the insurance premiums associated with high-value exhibitions.

The Indemnification process requires a preliminary application that provides an overview of the exhibition and the total value of the works to be exhibited. Once this application is accepted, more precise details are required relating to the works of art: the owners, the condition reporting arrangements at the premises of the lenders and at the Gallery, the packaging arrangements, the transport arrangements including dates of travel and storage, and the insurance values. These are the issues that apply to any and all loans to and from the Gallery.
Unit 4:
Studio practice and art industry contexts:
Interview with Jason Smith, curator of Fred Williams in the You Yangs

What have been the processes associated with the production, presentation and promotion of the exhibitions?

Geelong Gallery undertook a comprehensive multi-media approach to promoting and marketing Fred Williams in the You Yangs including:

— Publicity campaign
  social media campaign (Facebook, Youtube, Instagram and Twitter) and local, state-wide and national print and online media engagement

— Advertising campaign
  online and traditional media advertising including Geelong Advertiser, Art Guide, Design Files and Geelong Surf Coast Living.

— Education and public programming calendar
  in-Gallery and outreach programs have been designed to engage with new and diverse audiences including children-specific programs, in-conversations, lectures and adult workshops. Geelong Gallery has also implemented a Virtual Reality project to assist with the understanding of Fred Williams’s artwork and experience as an artist. Furthermore, the Gallery’s education resource forms a significant marketing opportunity to bring students to the exhibition.

— Direct marketing
  Geelong Gallery uses it’s growing database to promote the exhibition through e-communications, a printed and mailed newsletter and an invitation.

— Promotional material and signage
  Geelong billboards, posters, flyers and Gallery signage are all used to promote the exhibition.

— Alliance partners
  Geelong Gallery also promotes exhibitions through partners such as Tourism Greater Geelong & Bellarine, Tourism Victoria and Arts Atlas.

— Merchandise
  Geelong Gallery has produced a number of lines of merchandise to support the exhibition and generate income and promotional opportunities including a silk scarf, notebook, postcards, tote bag and catalogue (all available for sale online and in store).
Fred Williams
Old gum, You Yangs 1978
oil on canvas
Private collection, Geelong
Photographer: George Stawicki
© Estate of Fred Williams
Visit the Geelong Gallery

Pre-visit information
To help us conserve works in the Geelong Gallery’s renowned collection for current visitors and future generations to enjoy, we recommend the following:
— Prior to your visit, educators/supervisors to brief students on appropriate behaviour in the Gallery (eg walking in the Gallery, listening to instructions and not touching the works)
— Students should take care entering and leaving the building from and to the bus
— Students to check all bags, backpacks, coats etc in the cloakroom immediately on arrival and assemble in the Gallery foyer
— Food and drinks are not allowed inside the Gallery
— Please consider other visitors
— Educators to accompany their group at all times during their visit
— Stools and clipboards are available for student use
— Only pencils are to be used in the Gallery

Cost
An entry fee will apply to Fred Williams in the You Yangs:
Self-guided $5
Tour by Gallery Educator $7

Bookings
Bookings are essential for all Learn programs and group visits:
T 03 5229 3645
learn.booking@geelonggallery.org.au

Exhibition sponsors

Endnotes
1. Fred Williams interviewed by James Gleeson for the Australian National Gallery collection, 3 October 1978.
2. ibid.
3. ibid.
4. ibid.

Indemnification for this exhibition is provided by the Victorian Government.

Geelong Gallery
Little Malop Street
Geelong 3220
T +61 3 5229 3645
geelonggallery.org.au/learn