

## The City of Melbourne's Collection of Portraits

by Phip Murray



Tom Roberts, *Portrait of Alderman Samuel Amess* (mayor 1869–70), 1886  
Bob van der Toorren, *Portrait – Moomba Queen Mother – Dame Edna Everage*, 1983

From Tom Roberts's sublime painting of Mayor Samuel Amess to Bob van der Toorren's ridiculous photograph of Dame Edna Everage as Queen Mother of Moomba – plus the odd photograph of a council engineer pointing out a pothole – the City of Melbourne's collection of portraits is nothing if not idiosyncratic. A collection of marvellous diversity and range, it features thousands of faces in artworks that comprise everything from true art-historical treasures to pop-cultural delights.

The collection was established when Melbourne City Council was inaugurated in 1842 and it now includes more than 8000 items, with an estimated value (at the time of writing) of \$64 million. Its age and depth result in a more compact – and council-oriented – version of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) collection of Australian works. Many of the country's most celebrated artists feature in both collections. In the city's collection, for instance, there are portraits by Australian impressionists such as Tom Roberts and Charles Douglas Richardson; modernists such as William Beckwith McInnes and Sir William Dargie; and contemporary artists such as Patrick Pound, Destiny Deacon, Sangeeta Sandrasegar and Callum Morton. Truth be told, there are also works of more variable quality, with artworks by seriously talented artists rubbing shoulders (appropriately) with portraits that are unremarkable or even – in the case of one mayor given unflatteringly green skin – remarkably strange. Similarly, portraits of highly recognisable figures, such as HM Queen Elizabeth II, Moomba King Ian 'Molly' Meldrum and the lord mayor of the day, mingle with depictions of less easily recalled historical figures. For example, few Melburnians will know of the early settler and master sheep breeder John Aitken, though he was much admired in his day.

While historically the collection has focused on the mayors, monarchs and other official personages who have loomed large in the story of Melbourne, in more recent years the collection has significantly broadened. Since 2005, the city has collected works reflecting not only the civic and ceremonial life of council but also, more democratically, its diverse citizenry. In short, it has broadened to become a true 'city collection'. This essay considers both major curatorial areas, exploring not only the historic and official portraits but also the city's more recent collection of contemporary portrait works.

# 1. Mayors, Monarchs and Moomba: The City of Melbourne's collection of official portraits

Whether you love them or loathe them (as Program Manager Eddie Butler-Bowdon has been known to say), the City of Melbourne's collection of 'official' portraits form the foundation of its collection. Many of the portraits of Melbourne's good and great – and, to be fair, now besmirched and beleaguered – are on display in the impressive surrounds of Melbourne Town Hall.

## Colonial hangs



Sir Francis Grant, *Portrait of Governor La Trobe Esq.*, c. 1838

Linda Marrinon, *Melburnian, the Carlton Inn*, 1970, 2017

Louise Hearman, *Untitled #1366*, 2012

The top office is a good place to begin considering the official and historical portraits. As the lord mayor labours for the benefit of our city, he or she has customarily shared the office with the first governor of Victoria, Charles La Trobe, through a portrait created by the British painter Sir Francis Grant. It is a compelling, almost life-size portrait, one of four completed by Grant, with a less-finished version hanging in State Library Victoria, just up the road. The *Argus* reported, '[La Trobe] desired not only to have a good likeness, but a work of art', a wish that was evidently fulfilled.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond that, the hang in the lord mayor's office inevitably changes with the incumbent – and with their taste. At the time of writing this text, Robert Doyle was ousted as lord mayor and Sally Capp became Melbourne's 104th mayor, the first woman to be directly elected. This change in leadership precipitated a refurbishment of the lord mayor's office, comprising repainting, changed décor and a rehang. The changed interior feels symbolic of a change in leadership style and values. Robert Doyle's office was a fairly classic example of a Liberal-voting, establishment Melbourne gentleman's lair. He held his meetings on a suite of leather chesterfields, with visitors overlooked by some handsome portraits of the white men who had figured in the official history of Melbourne's foundation. One such example was a nicely handled portrait by Malcolm Stewart of Lord Melbourne William Lamb, the English prime minister and good friend of Queen Victoria – and also, of course, our city's namesake. In Capp's reconfigured office, the chesterfields have been replaced by a meeting table, reflecting a more corporate managerial style in keeping with her roles at KPMG, ANZ and the Property Council of Victoria. Capp also expressed interest in a new hang of artworks. The old faces from colonial Melbourne have been swapped for figures familiar to us today. Perhaps most symbolic of the new energy inhabiting the head office is the relocation of Lord Melbourne down the hall to make way for Linda Marrinon's bronze sculpture of a woman, identity unknown, dressed in 1970s flares. Of this far more proletarian subject, Capp stated: 'I love this Melbourne woman as she walks around the city', appreciating the way, as Capp said, the artwork 'celebrates the average woman'.<sup>2</sup> Marrinon had exactly these intentions for the work:

This work was conceived as a commemoration of the people on the streets of Melbourne going about their tasks. In contrast to the named and celebrated figures who are often the subject of bronze sculptures, particularly in public buildings, the anonymous figure here is dressed in the fashion of the day and is on her way somewhere, carrying something.<sup>3</sup>

Elsewhere in the office, Capp's love of football is represented through Louise Hearman's oil painting of a football referee caught in the middle of some limb-flinging action, a portrait that captures the extreme physicality of AFL – even for the refs. A self-described 'feral' supporter of the Magpies, she was also the Collingwood Football Club's first female board member.<sup>4</sup> Let's hope Hearman's ref was making a call in favour of Collingwood.



Artist unknown, *Portrait of Henry Condell Esq.* (mayor 1842–44), undated

Just up the corridor, outside the CEO's office, is a (regrettably unattributed) portrait of Melbourne's very first mayor. Henry Condell, mayor from 1842 to 1844, was a publican by trade, who had a long career in state and local politics (his rivals complained about his persuasive use of free beer when campaigning). His portrait gives the sense of an eagle-eyed, no-nonsense character, standing beautifully upright in an impressive black frock coat with a gold chain.



One of Melbourne Town Hall's most remarkable spaces is the Yarra Room, a colonial hall hung with an extraordinary collection of full-length mayoral portraits from the 19th century. Placed quite high on the walls, in spectacular gilded frames, they emanate a patrician energy and prestige. These upright, formal portraits exemplify the classical lineage of formal portraiture.





Ludwig Becker, *Portrait of John Hodgson*, c. 1855

One of the oldest and most handsome mayoral portraits hanging in this room is Ludwig Becker's portrait of John Hodgson, painted around 1855. Hodgson was mayor from 1853 until 1855, the second decade of council's existence. He was a land speculator – a turbulent occupation that rendered him wealthy twice and insolvent once – who was also famed for his fine racehorses, a two-foot cucumber grown on his land and his establishment of 'Hodgson's Punt', which once enabled people to cross the Yarra river from Studley Park to Collingwood. He was active and successful in local politics – despite the *Argus* repeatedly accusing him of 'creep[ing] about back lanes' to solicit votes<sup>5</sup> – and a keen member of local philosophical and scientific societies, an interest he shared with Becker.

Becker was a German artist who dazzled many in Australia as a kind of brilliant Renaissance man. His portrait of Hodgson exemplifies his beautiful handling of oil paint. Lady Dennison, Becker's host in Tasmania, described him as a:

... most amusing person. Talks English badly, but very energetically – he is one of those universal geniuses who can do anything ... a very good naturalist, geologist ... draws and plays and sings, conjures and ventriloquises and imitates the notes of birds so accurately.<sup>6</sup>

Hodgson was vice chair of the exploration committee that established the Burke and Wills expedition of 1860, and he made Becker expedition artist, naturalist and geologist. State Library Victoria holds Becker's sketchbook, with its exquisite studies of landscapes, plants and animals, which he had created before he died of dysentery and scurvy in April 1861. Hodgson did not live to hear of Becker's demise, as he died of bronchitis a few weeks prior to the expedition's departure.



Charles Summers, *Burke & Wills Monument*, 1865  
Robert O'Hara Burke, before 1860

Such connections with major episodes of Australian history occur frequently in the City of Melbourne collection. On the theme of Burke and Wills, the collection holds a rather ghostly miniature, which is the last known photograph of Burke, along with Charles Summers' bronze sculpture of Burke and Wills. The latter usually sits in a high-profile position in Swanston Street and is one of Melbourne's most polarising pieces of public art. Just whose portraits should preside over Melbourne's public space is a most political question, and the contributions of public figures to history can be reappraised in startling ways. In the 19th century, Burke and Wills were considered heroes: a large crowd gathered in Royal Park to see them off, while a mass of some 40,000 people gathered in a public outpouring of grief after news of their demise. Their role as

pioneering forefathers is staunchly defended by some, but others see their claims as spurious. Calls for amendments to the memorial have come from within council itself. Cr Rohan Leppert, Greens councillor and chair of the Arts, Culture and Heritage portfolio, has called for the amendment of the sculpture's plaque commemorating Burke and Wills as 'the first to travel the continent from north to south', acknowledging Indigenous Australians have traversed the country's interior for thousands of years. 'We always have to be reviewing these things', he said. 'I think it's good to have these plaques on memorials we're perhaps not so proud of now, so we have a clearer understanding of history in the public realm.'<sup>7</sup>



William Beckworth McInnes, *Portrait of John Batman*, c. 1934

Similar calls for amendment resulted in a plaque being retrospectively fitted to the public monument to John Batman erected in 1881. In the 19th century, Batman was a heroic figure, and the public was inspired to donate funds for a bluestone monument celebrating his endeavours. The monument's original text describes pre-settler Melbourne as 'land then unoccupied', exemplifying a kind of whitewashing endemic in much Australian history-writing. Batman is long lauded as the quasi-mythological original settler, who proclaimed 'this will be the place for a village' on his arrival in 1835. But his 'acquisition' of the site now known as Melbourne through a 'treaty' with local Wurundjeri elders is today regarded highly dubious. In more recent years, and commensurate with this changed understanding, council affixed a plaque to the monument acknowledging the original version of history as 'inaccurate', and it issued an apology to the traditional owners of the land.

What to do with artworks that represent outdated or odious understandings of history is a complex question for council. Batman is further represented in the collection by a portrait by William Beckworth McInnes, a respected portrait painter who was also director of the National Gallery Art School in the 1930s. Created at the time of Victoria's centenary celebrations, McInnes's painting, which presents Batman in full pioneer mode staring loftily across a bright, airy stretch of scrub, was instrumental in bolstering Batman's heroic status in local history. In addition to McInnes's final portrait, the city holds two preparatory sketches, one a mere adumbration of the subject and one that is rather more formed. The sketches not only give an interesting insight into McInnes's portrait-making process but also can be read as metaphors for the process by which historical subjects become highly mythologised and, in some cases, undone. For many years, the finished portrait and the preparatory sketches were on display in the Town Hall; now, they are in storage. Similarly, at one time it seemed a shame that the city did not have a commemorative portrait of Rolf Harris as 1975's Moomba King. Now, it seems a fortuitous omission.



Hamo Thornycroft, *General Charles George Gordon*, 1887

Artworks commissioned through public subscription give a fascinating insight into the values of Melburnians. Near Parliament there is a bronze statue of General Charles George Gordon, erected in 1887 through public subscription. Although today he may have a very niche following, Gordon was beloved during his lifetime. A member of the British Army, he built his reputation first on the battlefield in China and subsequently in Egypt and the Sudan. He died in Khartoum in 1885, aged 51, where for a year, in a move that was in defiance of his orders from the British government, he entrenched himself behind a barricade before succumbing in battle. The Australian public, which has historically loved anti-establishment figures (especially when it is the British establishment), was extremely moved by the story of General Gordon of Khartoum and a local movement took shape to erect a public monument in Melbourne by the English Royal Academician Hamo Thornycroft, based on a sculpture of Gordon Thornycroft had created for London. The enormous outpouring of public sentiment for Gordon was matched by an equally enormous donation from the local community, which is curious to think of today when Gordon is hardly remembered at all.



Tom Roberts, *Portrait of Alderman Samuel Amess* (mayor 1869–70), 1886

To return to the Yarra Room, this space contains one of the art-historical jewels in the collection, Tom Roberts's *Portrait of Alderman Samuel Amess* (1886), mayor during 1869–70. The full-length portrait is a vivid and sensitive likeness created by the young artist as he was on the cusp of developing innovations that would change Australian art forever. Some areas of the canvas suggest the kind of loose handling that would become crucial to Australian impressionism. This portrait also represents an instance in which the fame of the artist has eclipsed that of the subject. In 1886, Alderman Amess was the significant public figure; now, it is Tom Roberts who is a household name – an interesting reversal of public fortunes.



George Folingsby, *Portrait of Godfrey Downes Carter* (mayor 1884–45), 1884

Evidence of an intriguing ‘culture war’ can be seen in the Yarra Room, with Roberts’s painting juxtaposed with George Folingsby’s painting of Godfrey Downes Carter (mayor 1884–85). In this accomplished portrait, the ground of black bitumen is evidence of Folingsby’s Munich School training. In 1882, he arrived in Australia from Europe to direct the National Gallery Art School, where he taught soon-to-be Australian impressionists such as Frederick McCubbin, though not Tom Roberts, who had already left for London. Folingsby was greatly admired as a teacher, and his students learnt much from him. But in 1885, a schism developed between Folingsby and his students, when Tom Roberts – recently returned from London with a mania for painting *en plein air* (in the open air) – was met with disdain from Folingsby, who believed that ‘the man who paints landscape in open air is a fool’.<sup>8</sup> A group of young artists banded behind Roberts to paint outdoors, leading to the development of Australian impressionism, perhaps our most popularly celebrated movement. If the students had remained in the studio with Folingsby, our art history might have been much altered.



Artur Jose de Loureiro, *Alderman James Cooper Stewart* (mayor 1885–86), 1887  
John Calder; James Erskine Calder, *Portrait of Edward Cohen* (mayor 1862–63), 1863

The Yarra Room also holds a vivid full-length portrait by Portuguese-born artist Artur Jose Loureiro, depicting James Cooper Stewart, mayor during 1885–86. After exhibition in Melbourne, the work was acquired through public subscription, with the campaign for the £200 price tag no doubt encouraged by the energy of Loureiro’s work and the *Bulletin* describing it as ‘one of the best portraits ever painted in Australia’.<sup>9</sup> Some respite from the depictions of British ancestry in the room is provided by the forceful portrait of Edward Cohen, Melbourne’s first Jewish mayor (1862–63), by one of two colonial artists named James Calder (there is some confusion as to which!). History remembers Cohen kindly for his determined advocacy for the right to education of all Melbourne children.



Francis Frederick Hutton, *Portrait of John Aitken*, 1854

Elsewhere in Melbourne Town Hall are numerous portraits of colonial figures who, though not officially active in council, loomed large in the early days of settler Melbourne. For instance, a handsome portrait by Francis Frederick Hutton of pastoralist John Aitken came into the collection in 1854 via public subscription. An early settler in Melbourne and the first in Sunbury, Aitken was a masterful sheep breeder who is credited for the substantial improvement of Australia's merino stock. When his ship docked in Port Phillip Bay in 1836, Aitken took on the Herculean task of personally carrying approximately 800 sheep from ship to shore. This allegedly quiet but clearly determined man garnered such strong community support that some Melburnians felt he ought to be rewarded by having a portrait made and hung in the Town Hall. In the 19th century, the mere fact of being one of the first Englishmen to get off a boat in Port Phillip was reason enough for one's portrait to be commissioned for the Town Hall. Such was the primary rationale for Thomas Flintoff's rather austere portrait of Gordon Augustus Thomson, who arrived in 1836. Now, however, settler status alone is not sufficient for one's portrait to be hung in the Town Hall, and so at the time of writing Thomson was in storage.



Thomas Flintoff, *Portrait of Gordon Augustus Thomson*, 1884



Council's tradition of group portraiture was initiated on 29 November 1867, when several distinguished Melburnians, presided over by the visiting guest Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, gathered to lay the foundation stone for an ambitious new town hall, one fit for Marvellous Melbourne. The day was commemorated with a formal and rather beautiful panel: elliptical photographs are scattered across the page, garlanded with the most exquisite floral illustrations. The portraits of masculine officialdom are somewhat feminised by the pretty design of pink cabbage-head roses and dainty bluebells. Prince Alfred and a few other

notables are festooned with a handsome arrangement of thistles, likely a nod to the Duke of Edinburgh's membership of the Most Ancient Order of the Thistle (among many other titles).



Similarly, a leather-bound album of portraits taken in 1892 commemorates the 50th anniversary of the city's incorporation, through photographs of council members of the time and those of 'surviving pioneers' (their loaded terminology) from 1842. Looking at the photographs it is possible to imagine Bourke Street as a dirt road with horses and drays, and to remember the age of bushrangers and drovers. Arguably, the portrait collection with the greatest clout is the 'leader board' (or 'rogues gallery', as a former lord mayor described it) on display in the Town Hall's 'corridor of power', which displays photographs of all mayors and lord mayors past and present. One wonders if some visitors look longingly and ambitiously at the vacant spot after the photograph of current lord mayor Sally Capp.

A Town Hall highlight is the portrait by the gifted painter Violet Teague that enjoyed the honour of travelling to Paris for exhibition in the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français, around 1898. An atmospheric composition in Edwardian browns and golds, the portrait is of Robert Rede, a friend of Teague's father. Rede is remembered as the highly divisive goldfields commissioner in Ballarat at the time of the Eureka Stockade. Teague provides a notable departure from the overwhelming majority of colonial portraits in the collection by male artists. So too Georgette Peterson, the painter of a less accomplished but still respectable portrait of James Paterson (mayor 1876–77).



Violet Teague, *Portrait of Colonel Robert Rede*, 1898  
 Georgette Peterson, *Portrait of James Paterson* (mayor 1876–77), 1909



Artist unknown, *Cr Frank Arnold*

One of the delights of the collection is a group of portraits of Cr Frank Arnold, a local real-estate agent who felt compelled to represent North Melbourne in 1874. The *Argus* reported how, after receiving ‘a most numerous signed requisition’, he declared his intention ‘to go to the poll and not to stand aside for any man’.<sup>10</sup> A rather lovely and simple unattributed drawing of Arnold often hangs in the lord mayor’s office, while a collection of five photographs present him in an almost ludicrous range of activities. He is variously depicted in head and full-length studio portraits, standing on the street in front of his business, dressed as a soldier and wearing a pith helmet while sitting on a donkey. The collection was unearthed during research for the exhibition *Good Looking: Portraits in the City of Melbourne’s collection*, held at City Gallery in 2013. During the research, curatorial staff kept noticing Arnold popping up in his many different guises – the City of Melbourne’s very own ‘Where’s Wally?’. Exhibitions such as *Good Looking* play an important role not only in stimulating new thinking and research into the city’s collection but also in the acquisition of new works.

Another suite of works commemorates the rather raffish John Thomas Smith, a one-time manager of the Adelphi Hotel in Flinders Lane and the man behind the Queen’s Theatre Royal, Melbourne’s first theatre. Smith was an enduring figure in local politics and clearly a man about town; history remembers him as ‘a well-known figure in white hat, white shirt frills and smoking a cutty pipe’.<sup>11</sup> In the collection, he is portrayed in numerous photographs and engravings, and, most winningly, in an expressive marble bust carved by Orazio Andreoni, whose workshop in Rome specialised in marble busts and figures of historical and biblical subjects. It is not clear how he came to create this bust of Smith. (Did Andreoni come to Melbourne?) One of his specialties was carving folds of fabric and diaphanous veils, evident in the marvellous handling of Smith’s clothing. His white frills have been preserved for history, but not his white hat nor his cutty pipe.



Orazio Andreoni, *Bust of John Thomas Smith*, 1883

## Post-Federation portraiture



Sir Samuel Gillott (mayor 1900–02, lord mayor 1902–03)

Baron Arpad Paszthory, *Portrait of Sir Samuel Gillott*, 1904

Charles Douglas Richardson, *Sir Samuel Gillott*, 1905

Photograph of (now lost) full-length portrait and mid-length photographic portrait

In 1902, the position of mayor was elevated to lord mayor, a right conferred on all former Australian colonies by King Edward VII around the time of Federation. The first mayor to enjoy this promotion was Samuel Gillott, mayor during 1900–02, then lord mayor in 1902–03. A lawyer by trade, Gillott made sure that Melbourne contributed to the fervor surrounding Federation in 1901 and the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York. He spared no expense in entertaining the royal guests and other dignitaries. Gillott had ‘the money to spend, and he entertained royally’; he ‘just turned on the champagne, cut the bands of his cigar-boxes and welcomed all the globe-trotters’.<sup>12</sup> In May 1901, Gillott’s munificence was rewarded with a knighthood.

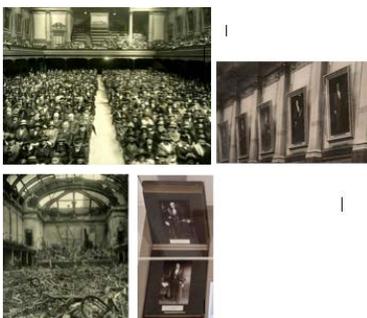
Gillott is represented in the collection by a cluster of portraits, including a marble bust, a photograph, a half-length oil painting and a photograph of a lost full-length oil painting. Charles Douglas Richardson, a protagonist in the Australian impressionist movement, created the marble bust, a nicely modelled head atop a burly pile-up of official regalia. The half-length portrait was acquired in 2011 after surfacing in a secondhand shop in Sydney, a thrilling example of a portrait returning to the collection after a long absence. It is by an interesting artist too, Arpad Baron de Paszthory (1867–1946), a Viennese painter whose European commissions included portraits of Pope Pius X and King Edward VII, and, in Australia, Dame Nellie Melba and Nellie Stewart.

Unfortunately for Gillott, his status nosedived within a few years. In 1906, he was caught in an imbroglio of illegal gambling and corruption. Especially bad press came via an article in the *Truth* with the saucy title 'Lechery and lucre'. The article accused him of loaning money to Caroline Pohl, popularly known as Madam Brussels, Melbourne's most infamous madam. For a while at least, Gillott's name went from lord mayor to mud.



Talma and Co., *Portrait of Alderman William Burton*, c. 1923

The portrait of Alderman William Burton is one of the collection's more curious works, due to its unusual choice of medium: a life-size photograph taken in black and white and then hand-painted. The portrait was created by Talma and Co., a photography studio situated across the road from the Town Hall. Remembered by the *Argus* as 'one of the most picturesque figures in Melbourne municipal life', who was 'always referred to as the "father" of the Melbourne City Council', Burton was a keen advocate for public health; he represented council on the board of management of the Melbourne Hospital and was later a great supporter of council campaigns against diphtheria and venereal disease.<sup>13</sup> His unique portrait absolutely breaks the mould of the formal oil painting. What inspired the picturesque Burton to forgo the customary oil painting for this more experimental approach to his official portrait?



In 1925, disaster struck the collection of mayoral portraits in the form of a fire that incinerated the Town Hall. Many works had been on proud display in the auditorium; regrettably, 37 of them perished and others were damaged. (Luckily, the portraits had been photographed, so there is at least documentation of the lost works.) Several paintings in the collection, such as the portrait of La Trobe in the lord mayor's office, have been cut down from full- to three-quarter length, due, it is suspected, to damage sustained by flames that licked at their subjects' feet. The fire was the worst instance of damage to the portraits, though other individual works have gone astray. Some left Town Hall surreptitiously tucked under the arm of the subject as he left his office for the last time. There is at least one instance of a portrait being magnanimously presented back to the city by the

family of a one-time lord mayor; however, provenance documents indicate it was the property of council all along.



William Dargie, *Portrait of Sir George Wales* (lord mayor 1934–37), c. 1950  
Dora McRae, *Portrait of Edward Wallace Best* (lord mayor 1969–71), 1971

While the collection of mayoral portraits can seem the very model of male power and privilege, not all subjects came from wealthy, establishment families. This was the case for Sir George Wales (lord mayor 1934–37), whose three successive terms – which automatically grant a knighthood – were quite an achievement for a boy forced to leave school at 14 to work as a railway labourer after his father was blinded in an industrial accident. Wales was committed to self-improvement, starting with night school and ending with his long stint as lord mayor. William Dargie captures some of Wales' determination in his portrait.

Another rarity in the collection is a commission undertaken by a female portraitist; the half-length painting of Edward Wallace Best (lord mayor 1969–71) was created by Dora McRae, a local landscape, flower and portrait artist. McRae has given Best much heft, a man-mountain of mayoral chains and medals, which he had the stamina to carry. A former athletics champion who had represented Australia, Best was on the committee that secured the 1956 Olympic Games for Melbourne.



Artist unknown, *Farnex Hercules and Apollo Belvedere*, 1928  
Artist unknown, *Bust of Dante Alighieri*, c. 1956

The collection also contains some oddities that are worth mentioning, including portraits of historical figures that bear only a tangential relationship to Melbourne. Take, for instance, the bust of Dante Alighieri, presented by the Dante Alighieri Society on the occasion of the 1956 Olympic Games, or the busts of Hercules and the Apollo Belvedere in the Queen Victoria Gardens, replicas of classical statues in Rome's Vatican Museum. The statues of Hercules and Apollo were gifted in 1928 by the then high-profile Melburnian Theodore Fink, in the hope that they would 'stimulate the national love of beauty'.<sup>14</sup> Stimulating a love of something else, a kitschy 1950s figurine, depicting a mayor holding a bottle of Worthington's pale ale behind his back with the inscription 'Behind every great man ...' on its base, adds a welcome touch of the ridiculous to the collection of mayoral portraits.



## Postmodern portraiture



Over the course of the 20th century, gender diversity makes a slow but welcome entrance into the city's collection of council portraits. After decades of group portraits of male councillors, nestled in the timber and leather surrounds of council, it is a relief when the commemorative panels start to include women. A panel from the 1980s announces not only the presence of women in the chamber but also the arrival of 1980s big hair. Previously, depictions of women on formal council business were often confined to photographs of functions for lady mayoresses.



Anne Spudvilas, *Portrait of Lecki Ord* (lord mayor 1987–88), 1989

One of the fascinating aspects of the city's collection is the opportunity to explore how conventions for portraiture have changed over time. The collection reveals an increasing tendency to informality: yesteryear's highly formal portraits have been replaced by today's more relaxed and approachable works. By the time of postmodernity, protocols had relaxed noticeably. Anne Spudvilas's portrait of Lecki (Alexis) Ord, Melbourne's first female lord mayor (1987–88), presents her posed quite casually and offering a friendly smile to visitors to the Town Hall's Portico Room.

In her discussions with Spudvilas, Ord was open to her portrait combining informality and tradition. In her words:

I supported the Town Hall protocols. I thought it was quite important, if you were a councillor, to feel you were in a place where important decisions were made – it needed to feel a bit different to the café next door. But, at the same time, I brought an air of informality. My children were often in the Town Hall running up and down the corridor and I used to wander round without my shoes on. So, an informal portrait was something that I appreciated, but I thought it was important to have the robes because that is the tradition and that's what describes your part in the place.<sup>15</sup>

In preparation for the portrait, Spudvilas took photographs of Ord in the Portico Room where, Ord recalls, 'the light was best'. The portrait now hangs in the Portico Room, although, as Ord remembers, it has moved around:

My portrait seemed to take on a life of its own after it was painted – a bit like the portrait of Dorian Gray. After I left, people used to tell me where my portrait had moved to. For a time, it was down the corridor near the men's toilets. I thought being in front of the men's toilets was a very powerful position because that's where most of the decisions were made, so keeping an eye on those boys would probably be a good thing.

The Portico Room also features a similarly direct mid-length portrait of Lord Mayor Des Clark (1992–93), who was fortunate enough to be married to the in-demand portraitist Irene Clark, whose other commissions include subjects such as Leo Schofield AO.



Irene Clark, *Portrait of Des Clark*, 1994

Despite their more relaxed countenances, Ord and Clark still wear the full mayoral regalia. Melbourne's top brass are always, well, in their top brass. All mayoral portraits show the subject in a white ruffled necktie, over which hangs the lord mayoral chain, consisting of 72 linked medallions engraved with the names and dates of former mayors, the crest of the City of Melbourne, and the city's motto, *Vires acquirit eundo* (We gather strength as we go). Some elements change over time; early portraits show the mayors dressed in a long black robe trimmed with *rakali* (native water-rat) fur (made by Myer's men's department), but around 1960 this was replaced by a long black silk robe with gilded metal braid (supplied by the royal tailor, Ede & Ravenstock). Early mayoral portraits feature black winklepicker shoes with elongated toes and prominent buckles, but these seem to have quickly fallen out of favour. Over time, the lord mayor's hat was also abandoned; by the mid-1980s, according to a former lord mayor, the hat had begun to 'attract giggles' when worn in public and so it was put aside as a relic from a more formal era.



Myer, lord mayoral robe, c. 1910

Ede & Ravenstock, mayoral robe, c. 1960

Lord mayoral chain, 1884

Shoes (Alderman James Cooper Stewart and Alderman William Burton)



Jiawei Shen, *Portrait of John So (Lord Mayor 2001–08)*, 2003

Some portraits articulate significant cultural shifts. Jiawei Shen's full-length portrait of Lord Mayor John So (2001–08), Melbourne's first mayor of Asian ancestry and the first to be popularly elected, marks an important political moment in the life of council. So wears the traditional mayoral attire, but is also draped in an Indigenous possum-skin cloak, which was given to him by an Aboriginal elder on his election. Shen, who after migrating to Australia from China in 1989 made a living doing street portraiture at Darling Harbour, has described his depiction of So as a 'symbolist portrait'. In some ways it is highly traditional; in Shen's words, it 'keeps a similar composition as most old ones in the council collection'.<sup>16</sup> However, the combination of the traditional mayoral robes, his subject's Chinese heritage and his Indigenous cloak speaks of 'an extremely new landscape of Australian political life in the 21st century'.<sup>17</sup>

In the partisan environs of council, art-historical priorities can be a secondary concern to politics. Perhaps unsurprisingly, decisions about which portraits will grace the Town Hall's 'corridors of power' can be politically charged. Many fine specimens of Australian art history are consigned to the storage racks, due not only to lack of space but also sometimes to the portrait's lack of political clout. Conversely, the installer's logbook records one instance of a portrait's politics determining its location. To rotate the works on display, a certain portrait was removed from its prominent spot and placed into storage, but, before long, a directive from on high demanded that it be returned, and with speed. Another amusing anecdote concerns a high-ranking council staff member who felt such displeasure at a particular portrait that they ignored all the usual rules for art handling and personally removed the work from the wall. The offending portrait was then stacked (no doubt facing the wall) in the staff member's office, ready to be collected and banished to storage.

The city's collection of mayoral portraits is not a full set. The city currently holds portraits of approximately one-third of past mayors. Some portraits have been lost or destroyed; some mayors were disinclined to have a portrait made; while others were adamant that one must be done (and that it must hang in the Town Hall at all times). Perhaps surprisingly, there has been no formal process for mayoral portraits to enter the collection; historically, commissioning has been rather ad-hoc. Some commissions were funded by donations from fellow councillors; some commissions enjoyed public subscription (with senior council figures often initiating a collection and then enlisting local businesses or individuals to make up the balance); sometimes council earmarked the funds (as was the case for John So); and sometimes the subject themselves has paid for the commission. Historically, the process has been open to accusations of duplicity, with certain commissions perceived to relate more to the subject's clout, wealth or ego than to genuine merit or years of service. Over time, the process has become increasingly structured. Now, it is customary for the lord mayor to commission a portrait for the city's collection, particularly if he or she has held office for successive terms.

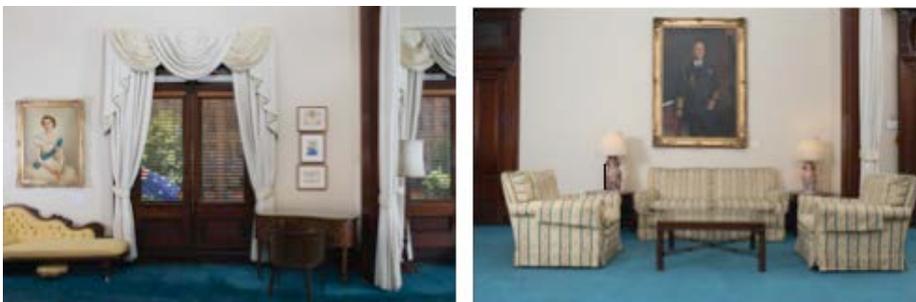
When Melbourne's first mayor had his portrait created in the 1850s, there would have been a limited supply of portraitists in the colony. Today, however, Melbourne has an international brand as a creative city, with a strong ecology of artists of every creed and kind. In line with the sophistication of the collection and the city's artistic credentials, careful attention is paid to commissioning strong, innovative artists (who may be tomorrow's Tom Roberts). With input from arts-industry peers on the Art and Heritage Advisory Panel, the program manager puts forward a list of potential artists to the lord mayor, who ultimately chooses the artist. Historically, most commissions have been awarded to painters working in oil, but, increasingly, photographers are also considered. One wonders how the lord mayor thinks about the commission: will they desire a few kindnesses from the artist in the transposition from life to canvas, or will they be more like Oliver Cromwell,

who insisted that his portrait include ‘all these roughnesses, pimples, warts, and everything as you see me, otherwise I will never pay a farthing for it’?<sup>18</sup>

At the time of writing, Robert Doyle had been toppled from his position as lord mayor following allegations of sexual harassment. First elected in 2008, he was enjoying his third term and 10th year as elected lord mayor before experiencing a horribly spectacular fall from grace. For years, Program Manager Eddie Butler-Bowdon had been encouraging Doyle to turn his mind to his mayoral portrait, hoping to get a commission underway. Now, that commission is looking unlikely.

## Royal representations

The Melbourne Room, a charming lounge on the second floor of the Town Hall, is the perfect environment for a pot of Twinings tea (made by appointment of HM), or perhaps a gin and Dubonnet (allegedly a favourite of the Queen Mother). Hanging above the chaises longue are numerous portraits of British royalty, reflecting Melbourne’s history as a British colony, yet maintaining an Australian edge through the fact that most were created by Australian artists.



Beatrice Johnson, *Portrait of HM Queen Elizabeth II*, 1954

William Dargie, *Portrait of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh*, 1950

Beatrice Johnson’s romantic painting of the young Queen Elizabeth, created in 1954, just one year after her coronation, exerts a considerable presence. Born in Australia, Johnson (1906–2000) became a senior artist at Dorothy Wilding’s photographic studio in London. (Many of the studio portraits of royals in council’s collection are by Wilding’s studio.) Johnson was responsible for hand-tinting many studio portraits of the Queen, and her oil painting was likely based on one such studio image. The Prince Consort is depicted on the opposite wall in a half-length portrait painted by the one-time Footscray boy Sir William Dargie. One of Australia’s most celebrated portraitists, Dargie has an unbeaten tally of eight Archibald Prize wins.



Polly Borland, *HM Queen Elizabeth II*, 2002

The process for commissioning portraits of public figures is complicated and things can go catastrophically wrong. History provides an infamous example in Graham Sutherland's expressive modernist portrait of Sir Winston Churchill, a commission of 1954. On sighting the portrait, Churchill was enraged, allegedly describing it as 'filthy' and 'malignant'. Rather than being bequeathed to the parliamentary collection, the offending item was secreted away to the Churchills' country home where, legend has it, his wife broke the painting into pieces and burnt it. The City of Melbourne has not had an equivalent catastrophe, although some portraits have still been controversial.

Some Town Hall guides are regretful about the manner in which Australian artist Polly Borland photographed the Queen. Borland was one of a select few invited by Buckingham Palace to create the Queen's portrait on the occasion of her golden jubilee. The City of Melbourne acquired a headshot of Her Majesty set against a quite disco-gold background. Some find the portrait unbecoming and impudent, literally much too 'up in the face' of a royal personage. Yet Borland's bold version of the Queen has found many supporters, including, allegedly, the Queen herself. Borland's work is on display in the Melbourne Room, placed opposite Beatrice Johnson's more traditional oil painting, providing a wonderful study not only of the changing face of the Queen, but also of how protocols for portraiture have changed over her long lifetime.



Louis Porter, 2013

One Town Hall corridor displays royalty of a very different kind, in the fantastic – if also quite plastic – Moomba Monarch hall of fame. Beginning in 1955 and organised by council, Moomba is one of Australia's largest community festivals, its name supposedly taken from an Aboriginal word that has been variously translated to mean 'Let's get together and have fun' and 'Up your bum'. The bawdy version may be apocryphal, but it's still somewhat appropriate to the general air of silliness that pervades the festival, which has included the tradition of crowning a Moomba King and Queen – or, since 1988, a gender-neutral Moomba Monarch. Most years, Bob van der Toorren, a long-time commercial photographer based in Melbourne's Block Arcade, immortalised the monarch in a studio photograph.

The female portraits prior to 1988 hark back to the bad old days of unreconstructed gender politics. Between 1955 and 1987, the title of Moomba Queen was awarded to the winner of a beauty pageant, and the portraits taken during that period are signs of their times. The photographs of the 1950s and 60s transmit a more sedate charm, while those of the 1970s and 80s tell a narrative of increasingly big, blonde blow-waves. The men's portraits, and the female portraits after 1987, give a potted history of local popular culture. Dressed in the deeply satirical Moomba royal robes, topped with an often-wonky crown, the subjects display the winning smiles of music-industry stars such as Johnny Farnham (1972), Ian 'Molly' Meldrum (1985) and Kate

Ceberano (2010); sport stars such as Lou Richards (Jester, 1972), Cathy Freeman (1995) and Mick Malthouse (2012); and TV personalities such as Graham Kennedy (1979), Daryl Somers (1983), Denise Drysdale (1998) and Bert Newton (2014). Unforgettable photographs – or at least inerasable from one’s mind – include exuberant theatre actor Frank Thring (1982) and ‘Queen Mother’ Dame Edna Everage (1983). A special shout-out goes to Molly Meldrum, who signed his photograph with an ebullient ‘To my Melbourne, Keep rockin!’.



Bob van der Tooren

*Moomba King – Johnny Farnham, 1972 | Moomba King – Ian ‘Molly’ Meldrum, 1985 | Moomba King – Barry Crocker, 1976 | Moomba King – Daryl Somers, 1983 / Moomba Queen – Kim Formosa, 1981 | Moomba Queen – Sharon McKenzie, 1982 | Moomba Queen – Anne Erickson, 1985 | Moomba Princess – 1982 | Moomba Queen Mother – Dame Edna Everage, 1983 | Moomba King, Frank Thring, 1982*

## 2. Alternative Accounts: the changing face of contemporary Melbourne

Like many Australian collections of its nature and vintage, the City of Melbourne’s collection predominantly documents events relating to European colonisation. This has historically resulted in a relatively homogeneous collection at odds with Melbourne’s reality as a diverse and multicultural city. Since 2005, as a way to redress this imbalance, the city has intentionally acquired works by contemporary artists that narrate alternative histories and challenge the collection’s normative historical narrative.

### Urban Indigenous portraiture



Trevor Nickolls, *Clash of Cultures*, 2006

Historically, the most glaring omission has been in relation to the long history of Wurundjeri inhabitation of Melbourne and its surrounds. This has been redressed by a focus on collecting works by urban Indigenous artists. As a curatorial grouping they provide important critical commentaries on the broader collection. Trevor Nickolls's painting *Clash of Cultures* (2006) makes an important contribution to portraiture. The composition includes 13 faces, both in profile and frontal views, as well as Nickolls's recurring motif of intersecting black and white faces, a reference to the complexities of Indigenous subjectivity in a post-colonial world and Nickolls's experience of being forced to transition from, in his words, 'Dreamtime to Machinetime'.<sup>19</sup> *Clash of Cultures* queries the assumption underwriting the lineage of classical portraiture, which holds that we each have a single, stable identity that can be captured in a portrait. Nickolls's multiple and fragmented subject raises questions regarding the nature of subjectivity. What, after all, is a 'subject' and how can a person's conflicting impulses and desires be collected and captured in a single viewpoint? Is the subject really as coherent and singular as the historical tradition of portraiture encourages us to believe?



Georgia MacGuire, *Ill-fitted Young*, 2013

Georgia MacGuire's sculpture *Ill-fitted Young* (2013), displayed in a case in the Melbourne Town Hall, appears at first sight to be a contemporary Indigenous rendition of classical statuary. By stitching together the paperbark of a melaleuca tree, MacGuire has masterfully crafted a torso reminiscent of the *contrapposto* forms of classical sculpture (think the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* or the *Venus de Milo*). To this iconic and antiquated form MacGuire also brings a deeply personal meaning. The stitched-together sculpture references the 'one good dress' that her mother bought for her each year – the 'one item of clothing', MacGuire states, 'which made me feel like I wasn't the poor black kid in the street'.<sup>20</sup> Simultaneously working in highly personal and highly iconic registers, *Ill-fitted Young* invites new ideas into the classical lineage of the sculpted human form. MacGuire inflects this classical lineage with the legacy of Indigenous art-making, the longest continuous tradition of art-making – in existence long before Antiquity.



Christian Thompson, Bidjara, *Hunting Ground*, 2007

*Hunting Ground* (2007), by Christian Thompson, a Bidjara man from central western Queensland now based in Melbourne, comprises a series of three self-portraits. They present him looking directly and dispassionately at the viewer, his gaze partially obstructed by three ceramic fragments, each decorated with a culturally loaded image: a kitsch portrait of an Indigenous child, a goldfield scene of two diggers, and blowsy, old-fashioned pink roses. By literally occluding his vision, the artist reminds us that the official history – the lens that we are accustomed to looking through – is a viewpoint that excludes. *Hunting Ground* destabilises the collection, distorting and troubling the official story. Thompson customarily works with self-portraiture in ways that encourage the rethinking of identity. 'Through my work', he states, 'I have tried to give people an insight into the complex nature of contemporary Aboriginal identity and have tried to impart to my audience – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – a space in which to consider their own ideas of what it is to be "Australian"'.<sup>21</sup>



Destiny Deacon, *Moomba Princess*, 2004, and *Moomba Princeling*, 2004

Destiny Deacon's *Moomba Prince* and *Moomba Princeling* (both 2004) respond directly to the city's Moomba festival. As noted earlier, a tradition of Moomba is the crowning of a sovereign who is memorialised in a portrait. Deacon's photographs, shot on location at the city's collection storage facility, in front of the racks holding the 'official' Moomba portraits, take aim at this tradition. In all their kitschy glory, the Moomba portraits are easy to love – and easy to poke fun at; they represent mainstream Australia's undying love for blonde Aussie gods and goddesses – the big-hair, big-teeth, big-personality people, some of whom form the pantheon of Logie winners. By stark contrast, Deacon has depicted her young Indigenous niece and nephew as alternative Moomba royalty, providing a sharp political criticism of what has traditionally been celebrated and made visible in Australia. For a while, Deacon's sharply satirical portraits were installed in the Town Hall, hung on either side of Jiawei Shen's formal portrait of Lord Mayor John So, in which So wears not only the traditional Lord Mayor's robes but also an Indigenous possum-skin cloak. This curatorial arrangement proved too potent for one former chief executive officer. Ignoring all the usual rules of art handling, he removed Deacon's works from the wall and stacked them ready for removal.

### Depicting diversity

Eugenia Lim's *New Australians (Yellow Peril 1980/2015)* offers a postcolonial perspective on Melbourne's history. Part of a suite of works exhibited under the title *Yellow Peril, New Australians* is a digital photograph printed onto a gold Mylar emergency blanket. The photograph is a re-presentation of a Lim family snapshot taken in 1980, which depicts Lim's father and mother, Yean and Susan, who had recently migrated from Singapore, in front of Ron Robertson-Swann's infamous sculpture *Vault* in Melbourne's newly opened City Square.



Eugenia Lim, *New Australians (Yellow Peril 1980/2015)*, 2015

*Vault* has completed the transformation from pariah to beloved local icon. Originally a crucial feature in Denton Corker Marshall's 1980s architectural design for Melbourne's now-demolished City Square, *Vault* was given the regrettable nickname 'Yellow Peril' by Cr Osborne, who was a fervent opponent of the work. Osborne lobbied hard for its removal on the grounds that it clashed with the area's historical architecture. Although *Vault* had staunch advocates, including then director of the NGV Patrick McCaughey, the abstract artwork proved too modern for many and was banished from City Square, languishing for years. Recently, Melburnians have rediscovered their love for *Vault* and it is now sited outside the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, a prodigal artwork returned.

The story of *Vault* and its pejorative nickname recall the pervasive strain of anti-Asian racism operative in Australian society from the earliest days of settlement until today. As Eugenia Lim states:

I am of the Chinese diaspora in Australia; I feel very Australian but look very Chinese. I was aware of 'yellow peril', the racist moniker for *Vault* and I started to see a strange parallel history between the *Vault's* history and the history of the Chinese in Australia. Australia experienced 'yellow peril' when the Chinese first arrived and another resurgence in the 1990s with Pauline Hanson. Xenophobia never really goes away; now, the favoured scapegoats are Muslims rather than the Chinese. Australia is economically reliant on China, which has shifted how we engage with the Chinese.<sup>22</sup>

The use of a gold Mylar blanket as a medium adds another dimension to the artwork. 'The blanket carries a loaded message', states Lim:

Mylar blankets are about survival and robustness, but they are also about fragility. We often see them in the news when refugees are being rescued. Mylar as a material says a lot in itself: its colour carries ideas of yellow peril and invasion, but it's also visually stunning. I started to think of gold as a symbol and a history as well as an alluring seductive material.



Now displayed in a central Town Hall office and visible from the 'corridor of power', *New Australians* introduces the historically under-represented narrative of Chinese migration to the environs of the Town Hall. The installing of *New Australians* prompted an accompanying portrait. The Lim family album holds many such photographs of Yean and Susan Lim posing in front of monuments across the world; there are 'decades of the same pose', says Lim, in which they 'pull the serious Chinese photo face'. In 2015, when Yean and Susan saw the artwork installed at the Town Hall, they commemorated their visit with 'a photograph of them posing in front of them posing, so to speak', says Lim.



Georgia Metaxas, *The Mourners*, 2010–11

Two photographs by Georgia Metaxas hanging in the Town Hall represent other significant waves of migration to Melbourne. Taken from a series titled *The Mourners* (2010–11), her photographs apply the classical techniques of formal portraiture to an uncommon subject. *The Mourners* presents a series of exquisitely composed portraits of widows from Italian, Maltese, Lebanese, Arabic and Greek backgrounds who have pledged to wear black ('widow's weeds') for the rest of their lives. The women's faces appear in marvellous detail against the black void surrounding them. The portraits pay graceful homage to Melbourne's widows, bestowing on them the attributes that in Western portraiture are classically associated with kings and queens (and mayors). Metaxas deliberately elevates her subjects, using the legacy of formal portraiture. In taking these exquisite photographs, 'existing backdrops of nursing home corridors, living rooms and church halls were replaced by the controlled environment of a travelling studio'.<sup>23</sup>

## Contemporary reflections on formal portraiture



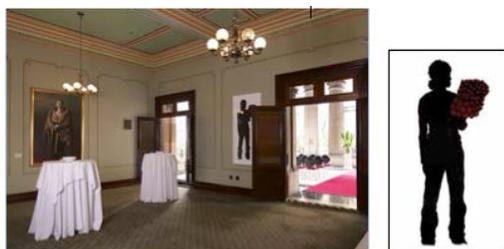
Tom Roberts, *Portrait of Alderman Samuel Amess* (mayor 1869–70), 1886  
Callum Morton, *Mayor*, 2013

In the stately environs of the Town Hall, the collection of imposing, formal mayoral portraits takes pride of place. But the adroit placement of contemporary artworks among this historical collection of mainly male subjects of political and civic life encourages a sensitive and critical rereading of the building and its past 'good burghers'. For instance, Callum Morton's *Mayor* (2013) responds directly to the full-length 19th-century mayoral portraits hanging in the Yarra Room, and in particular to Tom Roberts's *Portrait of Alderman Samuel Amess* (1886). In a clever curatorial juxtaposition, Morton's *Mayor* is positioned next to the entrance to the Yarra Room, inviting reflection on the mayoral portraits, which are one source of the grandiloquent energy evident in the Town Hall.

*Mayor* is one of a series that the artist describes as 'cover-ups', in which objects – in this case Roberts's portrait of Amess – are covered with a heavy fabric, computer-scanned and recreated in polyurethane. The replica is then painted to look like the original fabric and coated with resin such that holes appear on the surface, providing an antiquated appearance. *Mayor* has the same scale and heft of the full-length colonial portrait it mimics, but its content and meaning have shifted and become mysterious. Morton has deliberately obfuscated both the original subject and the original artwork's meaning. As he states:

In my works, I have often hidden or removed a narrative element from the viewer, making the full picture hard to discern. In my mind, the uncanny object that emerges is open to a raft of shifting readings. Such is the case for *Mayor*. Is it a work being protected or is it about to be unveiled? Aren't these duties of protection – of the office, of the city – and unveiling part of the role of mayor?

The work appears soft, but up close its hardness is revealed. Does the draped fabric relate to mayoral robes? Is there a real painting under the deep green fabric, a green that reminds one of town hall interiors? If so, whose painting is it and what is its subject? It would be lovely to think that one day my *Mayor* could take its place alongside the other mayors in the Yarra Room. In a sense, it has become a portrait of every mayor who has ever held the office.<sup>24</sup>



Sangeeta Sandrasegar, *Untitled (Flower Seller)*, 2007–08

A critique of privilege is offered by Melbourne-born artist Sangeeta Sandrasegar's full-length portrait *Untitled (Flower Seller)* (2007–08), which hangs in the Portico Room, near Jiawei Shen's portrait of John So and Charles Bilich's portrait of Ron Walker (lord mayor 1974–76). The full-length portraits in Melbourne Town Hall predominately depict entitled and empowered men, sure of their authority and legacy. By contrast, Sandrasegar's portrait, rendered in black felt as a silhouette, presents a disempowered and anonymous female subject striving to make a living by selling flowers. From a series titled *The Shadow Class*, Sandrasegar's portrait is part of what she describes as 'a project on contemporary slavery, and the myriad

forms that exist today'.<sup>25</sup> Her postcolonial take on the tradition of full-length portraiture provides an unsettling counterbalance to the unrestrained privilege on display in many of the mayoral portraits.



Patrick Pound, *Untitled*, 2013

A photographic series commissioned from contemporary artist Patrick Pound in 2013 considers historical connections between the Melbourne City Council and Talma and Co., a photographic studio established in the 1880s. Talma sat opposite Melbourne Town Hall and one its managing partners, Henry Weedon, was lord mayor from 1905 to 1908; this probably explains why there are hundreds of Talma studio portraits in the collection. These unattributed portraits, which comprise part of the raw material for Pound's series, offer a charming insight into the faces and fashions of late-19th-century Melbourne. In the making of his works, Pound customarily draws from his own extensive collection of photographs. For the City of Melbourne, he created five sets of paired images, in which each Talma portrait is paired with an image from Pound's collection of vintage photo-booth portraits, which depict sitters not quite ready for the camera and caught in an unfortunate pose. The Talma portraits depict each person putting their best foot (or rather face) forward, striving to create their best-looking portrait. By contrast, Pound's photo-booth images are botched portraits. 'The photo booth is a miniature formal studio', states Pound. 'However, these photo booth images mischievously show people "caught unawares". Not quite ready for the camera, they blink or move out of frame.'<sup>26</sup> The series encourages reflection on the experience of having our photograph taken: how we pose for the camera, and how portraits are inevitably staged versions of ourselves.

### Portraits of everyday people



Kenny Pittock, *Elderly Man with Funny Neck*, 2014, and *Woman with Blue Hair*, 2014

In a Melbourne Town Hall corridor, six observational drawings by Kenny Pittock bring warmth and humour to an otherwise imposing interior. Pittock created the drawings of people on trains during his daily two-hour commute from Upper Ferntree Gully to central Melbourne, where he attended the Victorian College of the Arts. 'It was like life-drawing', he says, 'A way to keep my hand-eye coordination'.<sup>27</sup>

Over two years, Pittock compiled approximately 500 quickly but sensitively drawn character studies. The series captured a cast of characters and quotidian happenings familiar to any regular train traveller: a woman with blue hair (recalling Marge Simpson); an elderly man with a funny neck; and the kind of squabble endemic to public transport: 'How come', a commuter complains, 'he's allowed to wear clothes covered in mud but if I put my clean shoes where he's sitting I get fined four hundred bucks?'. Executed hastily and often unfinished, the sketches reflect the transient nature of train travel. 'I never thought "this one's done"', says Pittock. 'I would keep drawing until the person moved position or got off, or I had to get off. That would usually mean the drawing was over.' Sometimes people would catch him at it, and some got excited: 'That's great!', exclaimed one, 'I wish I could do that. The only thing I know how to draw is money out of the bank.'

Never nasty or satirical, Pittock's work delights in the humour associated with everyday people and everyday life. The titles – written in the same Texta used for the drawings and conveying a similar immediacy – capture the funny anecdotes that explain each drawing. 'I really respond to humour', says Pittock:

I grew up on *The Simpsons* and stuff like *Wallace and Gromit*. The thing I like about *The Simpsons* – and also about Pop Art – is that everyone can appreciate it. You can analyse it through the lens of art history, but the person on the street who does not go to galleries can also appreciate it. I like art and artists that work on both those levels. Sometimes my audience includes kids and non-art people. I like art history, but I also like being able to talk to people that are not thinking about art every day.

Pittock's drawings were acquired in 2014, part of a larger series that was exhibited at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. The City of Melbourne collaborated with Pittock to find a set of drawings that was diverse in tone and subject, as Pittock notes:

I think they work best as a series, such that it becomes a portrait of a particular train line. Train travel can be really funny; it can sometimes be upsetting; and, a lot of the time, it's really dull. You have no idea what you are going to get when the train stops and the doors open. I like places like supermarkets and trains where people from different walks of life come together.



Vivienne Shark LeWitt, *Untitled Sketch (Man at Filing Cabinet)*, 1994  
Lord Mayors Commendations

Pittock's drawings exemplify council's desire to more broadly and democratically reflect not only its ceremonial and civic functions but also the everyday people and places of Melbourne. This is also evident in Vivienne Shark LeWitt's relaxed portrait of the bespectacled and balding office worker Bob, a kind of patron saint of the thousands of Bobs – and their female equivalents, white sneakers on, heels in a carry bag – who every day make their way into town for work. LeWitt's portrait of Bob – leaning against the filing cabinet, drinking from his 'Bob' mug – is the gentlest of mug shots.

City workers are also celebrated in portraits taken for the annual Lord Mayor's Commendations, which acknowledges the contributions of independent small business proprietors in the City of Melbourne. Taken in the proprietors' places of work, Donna Stevens's photographs bring the faces and spaces of Melbourne to life, whether Dr Graham Culy in his dental studio, Manfred Schopf in his shoe repairs business or Joanna Pace leaning on a massive ice-cream prop touting her gelato shop.

In this football-mad, arts-loving town, it is fitting that a pastel drawing by Julian Martin, giving a vivid portrait of Michael Long, the Essendon player and Indigenous activist, forms part of the collection, as do Gerry Wedd's porcelain plates, charmingly hand-painted with portraits of beloved local songwriters such as Nick Cave, Adalita and Paul Kelly. Wedd's plates reflect Melbourne's reputation as a place where independent music, art and performance have thrived.



Julian Martin, *Michael Long*, 1995



Gerry Wedd, *Pot Culture*, 2014

Other artists have explored the streets of Melbourne as a stage for political events and as a canvas for everyday life. Taken in the 1970s and 80s, Sue Ford's black-and-white photographs depict faces at Vietnam rallies and Indigenous land rights gatherings. More recently, as the result of a 2016 arts residency, the City of Melbourne acquired a suite of around 60 photographs by Zoe Ali. The black-and-white portraits show the diverse people that inhabit, enliven and give meaning to the streets of Melbourne's '11th block', the area bordered by Swanston, Russell, Bourke and Collins Streets that has been active since Melbourne's earliest days.



Steven Rendall, *9 (detail)*, 2014, *The Shape on the Left Is the Back of the Screen I Am Taking a Snap of*, Melbourne, 2014, and *Circle*, 2014

Both the Melbourne Town Hall and Council House 2, which houses many of council's administrative departments, provide interesting contexts in which to display the city's collection; indeed, the Art and Heritage staff often display great nuance and playfulness in their curatorial decisions. At Council House 2, for instance, Sue Ford's *Woman Consumed* (1962), a suite of black-and-white photographs depicting a female figure being smothered by supermarket advertisement placards, makes a strong feminist and anti-capitalist statement made all the more acute by its placement above the marketing team's photocopier. Similarly, paintings by Steven Rendall presenting blurry scenes captured by security camera footage has been placed with lovely humour in the corridor leading to the Security Control Room.

The acquisition of contemporary works exemplifies a desire for the city's portrait collection to reflect not only council's official figures but also the people and places of Melbourne. Impetus for this change in focus came in 2003, when Eddie Butler-Bowdon took on the role of program manager for the Art and Heritage Collection. Butler-Bowdon built and extended scholarship around the city's remarkable collection of official portraits, while also recognising its constraints and lack of resonance with Melbourne's multicultural and multifaceted citizenry. Under his stewardship, the city's collection has become more inclusive and diverse.

In 2004, then deputy mayor Garry Singer paid a visit to the storage facility, alerting him to the fact that collection was stored in a substandard facility. ('This is a bit shit', he famously noted.) Singer's influence on council meant that the Art and Heritage program staff found support for their endeavours. By November 2004, the storage facility had new custom-built picture racks to store artworks and, in 2005, a panel of arts-industry peers was convened to provide advice on the acquisition of contemporary artworks. Working with a relatively small budget, compared to other collecting institutions, the panel considers works against four criteria: representations of Melbourne; the city as a universal theme; the city and environmental themes; and works by

urban Indigenous artists. Since 2005, council has built an exciting holding of remarkable artists and artworks that fulfill the curatorial aim to make the collection not only a portrait of council but also a far more fulsome portrait of Melbourne, with all its diverse stories, histories and faces.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Argus*, 15 January 1856.

<sup>2</sup> John Masanauskas, 'At last, the Capp fits; Mayor's big office revamp', *Herald Sun*, 20 July 2018, p.14.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Marrinon, artist statement, Art and Heritage Collection, City of Melbourne.

<sup>4</sup> Nick Lenaghan, 'How Melbourne's lord mayor Sally Capp built a high-powered network', *Financial Review*, 30 November 2018, [www.afr.com/news/politics/national/sally-capp-20181018-h16sit](http://www.afr.com/news/politics/national/sally-capp-20181018-h16sit), accessed 3 July 2019.

<sup>5</sup> *Argus*, 8 September 1851.

<sup>6</sup> Marjorie J. Tipping, 'Becker, Ludwig (1808–1861)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/becker-ludwig-2961/text4309](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/becker-ludwig-2961/text4309), published first in hardcopy 1969, accessed 27 November 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Ferguson, 'Burke and Wills statue latest in line for an amended plaque', *Australian*, 30 August 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Zubans, 'Folingsby, George Frederick (1828–1891)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 4, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 1972, p. 194.

<sup>9</sup> *Bulletin*, 19 March 1887.

<sup>10</sup> *Argus*, 10 March 1874.

<sup>11</sup> Jill Eastwood, 'Smith, John Thomas (1816–1879)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/smith-john-thomas-4609/text7583](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/smith-john-thomas-4609/text7583), published first in hardcopy 1976, accessed 17 June 2019.

<sup>12</sup> David Dunstan, 'Gillott, Sir Samuel (1838–1913)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gillott-sir-samuel-6390/text10921](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gillott-sir-samuel-6390/text10921), published first in hardcopy 1983, accessed 17 June 2019.

<sup>13</sup> *Argus*, 23 April 1925.

<sup>14</sup> Farnex Hercules, entry on the City of Melbourne's collection website, [citycollection.melbourne.vic.gov.au/farnex-hercules](http://citycollection.melbourne.vic.gov.au/farnex-hercules), accessed online 17 June 2019.

<sup>15</sup> All quotes from author's interview with Lecki Ord, June 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Jiawei Shen, artist statement, Art and Heritage Collection, City of Melbourne.

<sup>17</sup> Jiawei Shen, quoted at Art Gallery of New South Wales [www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/2005/28111](http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/prizes/archibald/2005/28111), accessed 28 July 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Quote from Gordon C. Aymar, *The Art of Portrait Painting*, Chilton Book Co., Philadelphia, 1967, p. 262.

<sup>19</sup> Trevor Nickolls, artist page, Australian and International Arts, [www.aiarts.com.au/trevor-nickolls.html](http://www.aiarts.com.au/trevor-nickolls.html), accessed 17 June 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Georgia MacQuire, artist statement, Art and Heritage Collection, City of Melbourne.

<sup>21</sup> Quote from a didactic panel in the exhibition *Good Looking: Portraits in the City of Melbourne's collection*, City Gallery, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> All quotes from author's interview with Eugenia Lim, March 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Georgia Metaxas, artist statement, Art and Heritage Collection, City of Melbourne, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Callum Morton, artist statement, Art and Heritage Collection, City of Melbourne, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Sangeeta Sandrasegar, artist statement, *The Shadow Class*, Murray White Room, Melbourne, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Patrick Pound, artist statement, related to the exhibition *Good Looking: Portraits in the City of Melbourne's collection*, City Gallery, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> All quotes from author's interview with Kenny Pittock, October 2017.