



Dangerously Modern: Australian Women Artists in Europe 1890-1940

The world is the biggest education you can get.
- Nora Heysen

Exploring the art and lives of fifty trailblazing women artists and revealing their vital role in the global story of modernism, *Dangerously Modern: Australian Women Artists in Europe 1890-1940* is a new exhibition presented by the Art Gallery of South Australia and the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

The first major exhibition of its kind, *Dangerously Modern* will feature more than 200 works of art by both celebrated and rediscovered women artists, spanning paintings, prints, sculpture and ceramics. Opening in 2025 – marking the fiftieth anniversary of International Women's Year – the exhibition will premiere at AGSA in Adelaide from 24 May to 7 September 2025 before being presented at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney from 11 October 2025 to 1 February 2026.

The artists featured in *Dangerously Modern* were part of an unprecedented wave of women travelling from Australia to Europe and beyond at the turn of the twentieth century. Overcoming centuries of social constraints, they pursued international professional careers, taking advantage of education and exhibition opportunities newly available for women in London and Paris. From these cultural hubs, many of the artists travelled widely, with some never returning permanently to Australia.

Dangerously Modern will invite visitors to embark on a journey of the senses. Artistic explorations of colour, light, form and movement will offer moments of contemplation, love, loss and transcendence. Ranging from large public statements to private portrait miniatures, the selected works will challenge previous notions of ambition and success. *Dangerously Modern* will include breakthrough works of professional intent alongside personal, diary-like expressions – spells of intimacy, internal battles, triumphs and tragedy. The exhibition will also expand understanding of modern art movements such as realism, impressionism, post-impressionism, cubism and the emergence of abstraction.

Emma Fey, Acting Director, AGSA, commented, 'Beginning as early as 1883 and 1885 the Art Gallery of South Australia and the Art Gallery of New South Wales respectively started to acquire the work of women artists. *Dangerously Modern* builds on the strengths of those collections, especially AGSA's representation of South Australian-born modern women artists, such as Dorrit Black, Stella Bowen, Bessie Davidson, Nora Heysen, Margaret Preston, Gladys Reynell and Marie Tuck. We're thrilled to collaborate with the Art Gallery of New South Wales on an exhibition that adds such depth to our understanding of Australian women artists during this period.'

Michael Brand, Director, Art Gallery of New South Wales, said, '*Dangerously Modern* brings together important works by an impressive cohort of groundbreaking women artists whose work flourished in Europe in the early 1900s and continues to captivate audiences today. We are delighted to collaborate with our colleagues at the Art Gallery of South Australia to delve deeper into the work of these renowned artists and to bring some lesser-known artists to the fore. We are especially pleased to present the work of Sydney-born artists from this period, including Grace Crowley, Anne Dangar, Daphne Mayo, Thea Proctor, Alison Rehfisch, Justine Kong Sing and Grace Cossington Smith, whose works are proudly held in our permanent collection.'

The exhibition takes its name from an article written by Thea Proctor, who, upon her return to Sydney from London in 1921, was surprised to find her art labelled as 'dangerously modern'. This title serves as a reminder of the boundaries these women artists were breaking, celebrating their contribution and critical successes as active participants in the development of international modernism.

Exhibition co-curators Elle Freak (Associate Curator of Australian Art, AGSA), Tracey Lock (Curator of Australian Art, AGSA) and Wayne Tunnicliffe (Head of Australian Art, Art Gallery of NSW) said, 'Dangerously misconceived, misunderstood and largely obscured from Australian art

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MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 31 October 2024

history, this project reconsiders the contributions of fifty women artists. Aligning with new scholarship, it challenges definitions of Australian art, recognising the active role of these women as catalysts for change, both at home and away.'

Offering a deeper understanding of a connected global network of artists, *Dangerously Modern* traces the continual ebb and flow of cultural exchange not only between Australia and Europe but also New Zealand. It will feature the work of several key New Zealand-born and European-born women artists, whose transnational connections to Australia and its artists were intimate.

A richly illustrated book accompanying the exhibition discusses the extraordinary art and lives of the women featured, highlighting how they broke with convention and forged independent careers during a time of rapid cultural and social change.

Dangerously Modern is presented by the Art Gallery of South Australia and Art Gallery of New South Wales.

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MEDIA CONTACTS Lindsay Ferris | Head of Communications, Art Gallery of South Australia
P +61 8 7085 1617 | E ferris.lindsay@artgallery.sa.gov.au

Elisabeth Alexander | Communications Officer, Art Gallery of South Australia
P +61 8 7085 1618 | E alexander.elisabeth@artgallery.sa.gov.au

IMAGES <http://agsa.sa.gov.au/media/dangerouslymodern>

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Header image: Grace Crowley, born Cobbadah, New South Wales 1890, died Sydney 1979, *Miss Gwen Ridley*, 1930, Glen Riddle, Barraba, New South Wales, oil on canvas on board, 72.0 x 53.0 cm, 87.2 x 68.5 x 5.5 cm (frame); Purchased 1995 with the assistance of South Australian Government Grant, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.