

Art gallery archive recognised by UNESCO world register

A rare archive documenting one of the nation's first commercial art galleries has today been added to the prestigious UNESCO Australian Memory of the World Register.

The [Johnstone Gallery Archive \(1948–72\)](#) and Arthur Davenport Photographs (1955–92), held by State Library of Queensland, documents the development of contemporary art audiences in Australia.

Brian and Marjorie Johnstone operated the Brisbane gallery from 1950 to 1970, brokering sales for artists such as Charles Blackman, Sidney Nolan, Donald Friend, Arthur Boyd, Ray Croke and Margaret Olley.

It was a focal point of artistic and social life in Brisbane with its Sunday exhibition openings becoming legendary.

The Johnstone's marketing, sales and operational strategies became widely adopted, and are still used by galleries today.

The archive includes scrapbooks, correspondence and exhibition catalogues and has been extensively used by researchers and art historians.

The Arthur Davenport Photographs support the archive by documenting artworks and installations at the Johnstone Gallery from 1964 until 1972.

The archive, recognised for its national significance, takes its place alongside other historic documents such as the Mabo Case manuscripts, the first Australian narrative film *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (1906), and the final draft of Dorothea Mackellar's iconic *Core of my Heart* (later *My Country*) poem.

Other State Library collection items on the [Australian Memory of the World Register](#):

- [Anzac Day minute book](#) (added 2019): details the Anzac Day Commemoration Committee's first meeting where it was agreed that Anzac Day would take place on 25 April 1916
- [Margaret Lawrie Torres Strait Island Collection](#) (added 2008): stories from the Torres Strait Islands, genealogical information on many Torres Strait Island families, slides and photographs, artworks, and research material
- [Manifesto of the Queensland Labour Party, 1892](#) (added 2008): a handwritten foundation document of the Queensland Labour Party
- [The Convict Records of Queensland 1825–42](#) (added 2009): records that document the penal settlement at Moreton Bay
- [James Tyson Papers](#) (added 2017): surviving records of the creator of one of Australia's greatest pastoral empires

Quotes from Minister for the Arts Leeanne Enoch:

“With the addition of the Johnstone Gallery Archive to the UNESCO register, the legacy of this Brisbane gallery will continue to have an impact on future generations.

“The Johnstone Gallery Archive helps tell the story of the trailblazing owners and artists who played a role in the evolution of contemporary art during a period of social change.

“This recognition highlights the important role the State Library of Queensland has in documenting and preserving our state’s history.”

Quotes from State Librarian and CEO Vicki McDonald AM:

“Brian and Marjorie Johnstone were charismatic innovators who helped raise the profile of some of the nation’s most well-known artists.

“As custodians of Queensland’s collective memory, the Johnstone Gallery Archive and Arthur Davenport photographs provides important context around the start of the commercial art scene in the Australia.

“The drama and ambience of their display methods made visiting the gallery unforgettable and their advocacy for the artistic community is an important part of our state’s history.

“This rare archive sheds light on the relationships between art dealer and client which is so often invisible to the public eye.”