



MEDIA RELEASE

Patricia Piccinini's skywhales return to tour Australia



The journey of Patricia Piccinini's skywhales continues as the monumental sculptures take flight on a new tour across Australia.

The National Gallery of Australia presents a second national tour of leading contemporary artist Patricia Piccinini's beloved *Skywhale* and *Skywhalepapa*. The National Gallery has partnered with venues in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and, for the first time ever, Western Australia to bring the hyperreal hot air-balloon sculptures to regional communities.

Skywhales Across Australia offers a unique 90-minute experience in the early hours of the morning where audiences can witness the magic of the skywhales at sunrise.

The slow inflation of the balloons, with cold air, then hot, allows the sculptures to rise from the ground and come to life. When fully inflated, and with weather permitting, they take to the skies together. This tour follows the successful 2022–23 National Gallery Touring Event *Skwhales: Every Heart Sings*, which saw the sculptures visit communities across the country including Mparntwe/Alice Springs, Tarntanya/Adelaide and Gimuy/Cairns.

Dr Nick Mitzevich, Director, National Gallery: 'From the rolling golden plains of Goulburn to the tropics of Townsville, people across the nation will be able to see the skywhales soar over iconic Australian landscapes.'

The skywhales have become a part of our country's contemporary culture. With touring initiatives such as *Skywhales Across Australia*, we can connect with all Australians and elevate the role art can play in our lives.'

Skywhales Across Australia is a project that centres around care and community. As the skywhales float across the country, Piccinini calls on communities to engage with them creatively and with a sense of wonder.

Patricia Piccinini: '*Skywhales Across Australia* is a project that talks about nature, family, evolution, care and wonder. The skywhales float into our lives to make us smile and think. Remember to look up. Among the amazing creatures that fill the sky, one day you might just see a skywhale too.'

With flights dependent on weather conditions, Piccinini noted this is one of the extraordinary elements of having the rare opportunity to witness the skywhales in flight; 'One of the best – and worst – things about this project is that we can only fly if nature allows us. We have to have the perfect conditions, it's one of the few situations in life when human beings can't force the world into giving us what we want. But when nature does allow it, it is all the more wonderful.'

Skywhales Across Australia 2024-25 program:

Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, SA	Wiradjuri Country	30 November 2024
Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery VIC	Bunurong Country	12 April 2025
Caloundra Regional Gallery, QLD	Kabi Kabi and Jinibara Country	4 May 2025
Shire of Northam, WA	Ballardong Noonga Country	17 May 2025
Vancouver Arts Centre Albany, WA	Kinjarling Country	31 May 2025
North Australian Festival of Arts Townsville, QLD	Gurambilbara Wulgurukaba Country	September/October 2025

Skywhales Across Australia is a National Gallery Touring Event, supported by the Australian Government through Visions of Australia and the National Collecting Institutions Touring Outreach Program.

Skywhales is the third instalment of The Balnaves Contemporary Series and is a Know My Name project.

Keep up to date with the latest skywhale movements on the [National Gallery website](#). If you see a skywhale, #Skywhales and #ArtAcrossAustralia on socials to join their journey across Australia.

IMAGES

Available [here](#)

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

ALICE FOSTER

Senior Communications and Content Officer

M | +61 448 255 133

E | alice.foster@nga.gov.au **or** media@nga.gov.au

IMAGE

Patricia Piccinini, *Skywhalepapa*, commissioned by the Balnaves Foundation, 2020, National Gallery of Australia, Kambarri/Canberra, © Patricia Piccinini.

ABOUT PATRICIA PICCININI

For over 25 years Patricia Piccinini has interrogated the complex relationship between our natural and artificial worlds, beginning each creative project with the posing of a speculative question, a wondrous ‘What if...?’ Known internationally for her astonishing hyperrealism, Piccinini’s practice comprises drawing, photography, video, mixed-media painted compositions, large-scale installation, and includes the now iconic hot-air balloon sculpture *Skywhale*.

Piccinini was born in Freetown, Sierra Leone in 1965 and arrived in Kamberri/Canberra, Australia in 1972. After graduating with a degree in economic history from the Australian National University in 1988 she pursued painting at the Victorian College of the Arts, graduating in 1991. With a group of fellow artists, including her husband Peter Hennessy, Piccinini established the Basement Project Gallery in Naarm/Melbourne in 1994. She and Hennessy have worked as a collaborative team ever since, operating out of Drome, their joint studio in Collingwood. Drome comprises a team of studio assistants, artisans, technologists and fabricators who bring a wealth of specialist knowledge to the expanding scale and complexity of Piccinini’s practice.

Piccinini began exploring the implications of biotechnology and genome sequencing in *The mutant genome Project* 1994–95, a series of digital photographs and installations. Her probing of the boundaries of nature and artifice, shared DNA, mutations and hybridity were further demonstrated in *We are family*, which was shown in the Australian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2003. *Skywhale*, an enormous hot-air balloon sculpture of an imagined flying mammal, was commissioned in 2013 and has since flown throughout the world. Recently, *Skywhale*’s companion piece, *Skywhalepapa*—Piccinini’s most ambitious project to date—was commissioned by the National Gallery of Australia with the support of The Balnaves Foundation. After launching in Kamberri/Canberra in 2021, the *Skywhale* family has taken to the skies of Australia, touring nationally as part of the National Gallery of Australia’s commitment to bringing art to all Australians.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA TOURING EXHIBITIONS PROGRAM

For over three decades, the National Gallery of Australia has shared the national collection with communities across Australia and the world through dedicated touring exhibitions. In partnership with galleries across the country, 148 touring exhibitions have presented over 10,000 works of art. Featuring history’s best-known artists alongside leading contemporary artists, the touring exhibition program aims to demonstrate the breadth of artmaking in this country and further afield.