

SKYWHALES ACROSS AUSTRALIA



'I imagine visitors assembling to watch *Skywhalepapa* coming to life,' says Piccinini. 'With a single skywhale figure we have a character, but with the two we have a relationship, and a narrative.'

- PATRICIA PICCININI

Exhibition overview

Patricia Piccinini's *Skywhalepapa* is a monumental sculpture in the form of a hot-air balloon. A companion piece to *Skywhale*, together they form a skywhale family. Following their debut together in Kamberri/Canberra, the sculptures took to the skies across Australia as a National Gallery Touring Event throughout 2022 and 2023. Now the Skywhale family will continue to inspire audiences across the country.

Skywhales: Across Australia is a generative project that centres around care and community. The story of the skywhale family is told in Patricia Piccinini's children's book *Every Heart Sings*. A comprehensive online learning resource for primary and secondary students considers concepts of love, care and responsibility in relation to family and environment. Musician Jess Green (AKA Pheno) has created a soundscape and pop song, *We are the Skywhales*, while keen knitters can make their own soft toys from a pattern developed by Canberra knitter Katy Griffis. As the skywhales float across the country, Patricia Piccinini calls on communities to engage with them creatively. Bring your picnic baskets, watch in awe, and sing in wonder as the skywhale family takes flight.

Skywhales Across Australia is a National Gallery Touring Event supported by the Australian Government through the Visions of Australia and National Collecting Institutions and Touring and Outreach programs. *Skywhales* is the third instalment of the Balnaves Contemporary Series and is a Know My Name project.



Patricia Piccinini standing inside *Skywhalepapa* 2020,
National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra
commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2019
purchased 2020
© Patricia Piccinini



About the Artist

For over 25 years Patricia Piccinini has interrogated the complex relationship between our natural and artificial worlds, beginning each project by posing the question: 'What if...?' Known internationally for her hyperrealism, Piccinini's practice comprises drawing, photography, video, mixed-media painted compositions, large-scale installation, including the hot-air balloon *Skywhale*. Exploring the idea of the malleability of the body through the intervention of science, Piccinini asks: 'What is our relationship to the nature that we change? What's it going to be? Is it going to be one where we nurture and are responsible for it? Or is it going to be one where we use it as a resource?'

Piccinini was born in Freetown, Sierra Leone in 1965 and moved with her family to Canberra in 1972. After graduating with a degree in economic history from the Australian National University in 1988 Piccinini 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 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 across a variety of mediums who bring a wealth of specialist knowledge to the expanding scale, complexity and hybrid nature of Piccinini's practice.





About the Curator

Elsbeth Pitt
Senior Curator
Australian Art

Elsbeth Pitt is Senior Curator, Australian Art, at the National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra. She specialises in modern and contemporary art, including performance, conceptualism and visual poetry.

She has held curatorial, honorary research and academic roles at the Australian National University, University of Adelaide, Art Gallery of South Australia, British Museum and Victoria & Albert Museum.



Tour information

Medium & format

Outdoor public event

Size/Running meters

See event description following

Inclusions

Dedicated project manager, on the ground event support, education resources, digital content, imagery and assets, marketing and communications support, programming support.

Exhibition fee

Exhibition fee waived for a maximum of four venues (in addition to current tour itinerary). Additional venues will be considered and required to pay a fee to support event costs.



Patricia Piccinini
Skywhalepapa, 2020
National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra
Commissioned with the assistance of The Balnaves Foundation 2019. Purchased 2020
© Patricia Piccinini.





The Event

The event occurs over a 90-minute period in the early hours of the morning, culminating in the lift-off of the Skywhales at sunrise. The slow inflation of the balloons, first cold and then hot, leads into a period where the skywhales are fully inflated and then take to the skies.

Location

Venues will be asked to identify potential locations from which to launch the Skywhales. The location must be large enough to accommodate a balloon exclusion zone with minimum dimensions of 80m x 90m (7200 m²) in addition to the audience viewing area. Other considerations include:

- Are there established hot air balloon launch sites in the region?
- Is there an oval, sports ground or park with built-in facilities/infrastructure?
- Early morning access to the site will be required (between 3am and 4am).
- Private vehicles are not permitted to enter the launch site.
- Road closures and access.
- Proximity to airports and other no-fly zones.
- Overhead lights/wires or any obstructions close to the exclusion zone.

Balloon Operation

The National Gallery will engage and coordinate a licensed balloon operator to fly the skywhales. The balloon operator will be responsible for the unpacking, flight, landing and pack-up of the balloons. Venue staff will not be required to participate in these activities.

Timing & Weather

The flight of the Skywhales is weather dependant. The likelihood of a successful free flight is impacted by factors including geography and time of year. To achieve the highest likelihood of success, the National Gallery will consult with both industry experts and venues to determine mutually suitable launch dates and locations. In the lead up to a scheduled event, the balloon operator is responsible for the final decision on whether or not the skywhales fly. This call may be made a week prior to or on the day of the event. Should the weather forecast in the week preceding the scheduled event cause the event to be cancelled, it may be possible that an alternative launch date can be identified. Rescheduling will need to be determined in consultation with the National Gallery – taking into consideration the Balloon Operators' availability – in advance of the scheduled launch.

The event

If the weather conditions allow for flight, the balloons can fly for up to 60 minutes. The flight paths will be subject to wind patterns and the landing site will be identified by the pilots at the time of flight. The balloons may land at separate sites.

Soundscape

A soundscape accompanies the launch providing a backdrop to the inflation and culminating in the pop song *We are the Skywhales* by musician Jess Green, against which the Skywhales launch into the sky. Audio playback equipment required.

Post-launch Balloon Care

During inflation and flight, moisture in the air causes the balloons to become wet. The balloons are at risk of mould growth if they are stored wet for any length of time and as such may require manual drying post-launch. Venues may be asked to help identify a suitable local venue for drying (e.g. a large hall or basketball court) that is clean, enclosed and secure, as well as to provide people to assist with the drying and repacking of the balloons into their boxes.

Event Delivery

Event management is a significant part of the delivery of a skywhales launch. Venues may consider partnering with local council, particularly where the launch site may be on council owned land. This has been a successful model across the tour to date. National Gallery support provided.



Dates & Venues

Tour available

From October 2025

Itinerary

2024

Goulburn Regional Art Gallery NSW

2025

Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery VIC

Caloundra Regional Gallery QLD

Vancouver Arts Centre, Albany WA

Shire of Northam WA

North Australian Festival of the Arts, Townsville QLD



Patricia Piccinini
Skywhales: Every Heart Sings Touring Event, Melbourne, 2022,
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Apply now

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Questions?

For more information, please email touringexhibitions@nga.gov.au



Patricia Piccinini
Skywhales: Every Heart Sings Touring Event, Maitland, 2023
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