

MEDIA RELEASE
20 January 2020

NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA FOUNDING DIRECTOR JAMES MOLLISON AO

The National Gallery of Australia notes with deep sadness the passing of the Gallery's founding director, James Mollison AO.

From 1971, for nearly 20 years, Mr Mollison was the driving force behind the creation of the National Gallery's unrivalled, world-class collection with his bold acquisition policy ahead of the opening of the gallery in 1982.

He inspired and provoked Australians with extraordinary art; from iconic Australian works such as Sidney Nolan's *Ned Kelly* series and *The Aboriginal Memorial* 1987-88, to exceptional international acquisitions such as Jackson Pollock's *Blue poles* 1952 and Constantin Brancusi's two *Bird in space* 1931-36 sculptures.

National Gallery Director Nick Mitzevich said Mr Mollison was one of Australia's greatest museum directors.

"His fearless risk taking inspired an entire country to talk about art," he said. "His impact was much wider than just art circles, wider than just galleries. He had an impact on the debate about art and culture in Australia."

Mr Mitzevich said Mr Mollison had an extraordinary impact on the national collection. "The artistic legacy of the national collection owes him a great debt," he said. "He was collecting history as it was being made."

"Many remember him for *Blue poles* but his legacy is so much greater – that work was emblematic of his foresight and the courage that he displayed over two decades of developing a truly great national collection for the people of Australia."

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

Sandra O'Malley
Communications Manager
sandra.omalley@nga.gov.au
0418 897 794