

Pets of all types take over the National Portrait Gallery

It is not every day that a national gallery turns its walls over to the animal companions that bring unconditional love and joy to their owners but this summer we have opened the doors to 15 contemporary artists with very different ways of depicting our furry, feathered and scaled pets.

The Popular Pet Show features more than 160 portraits, many large scale paintings, of famous and obscure Australians and their pets by contemporary artists Nicholas Harding, Lucy Culliton, Darren McDonald, Anna Culliton, Fiona McMonagle, Ken Done, Noel McKenna, Graeme Drendel, Robyn Sweaney, Kristin Headlam, Shen Jiawei, Jude Rae, William Robinson, Janet Dawson and Davida Allen.

Curator of the show Dr Sarah Engledow is excited to present an exhibition that everyone can enjoy. 'My intention for the show is to bring together a collection of works that's accessible for all types of people, including those who don't know much about art. All kinds of people with different interests love their pets, and all kinds of people who love their pets can relate in some way to the paintings in this show,' said Sarah. 'As a big fan of the internet, I've enjoyed my fair share of animal snaps, but I can't say I've learned much from looking at them. By contrast, the painted, sculpted and drawn pet animals in this exhibition make congenial guides to random, basic ideas about art.'

'Some artists go at their subjects in fervour and some labour over individual hairs. For me, even comparing how much blank space different artists leave around a dog or a bird is interesting. These are all really good artists; but I hope visitors will compare their pictures, appreciate their different approaches, and make up their own minds about what they like best.'

Dr Engledow has previously curated *Idle Hours, Paris to Monaro: Pleasures from the Studio of Hilda Rix Nicholas* and most recently *Arcadia: Sound of the sea* and she's known for her thoughtful and original storytelling.

The Popular Pet Show is open to the public from Friday 4 November 2016 until Monday 13 March 2017. Tickets can be purchased online at portrait.gov.au or at the information desk at the Gallery for \$10 per adult or \$8 per concession and young people under 18 are free.

A number of pet-tastic activities and events will be held in conjunction with *The Popular Pet Show*. The first celebrates farm-yard pets with a Country Fair on Sunday 13 November from 10.00am until 2.00pm. In the new year dog lovers will be able to bring their furry companions to a *Paws for Art* day with a variety of dog-themed activities, demonstrations and goodies.

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