

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

Announcing ...

The Immersive World of Thom Roberts

12 April – 20 July 2025

The first solo exhibition for this multidisciplinary, contemporary Australian artist, *The Immersive World of Thom Roberts* opens at the National Portrait Gallery on 12 April.

Born in Sydney in 1976, Thom Roberts' practice is a sustained act of world building, where people, trains and buildings are intertwined with overlapping entities. In his work, and in his life, people are bestowed new identities and exist as multiple personas. Roberts himself identifies as the Country Link Express train and the Kingdom Tower in Saudi Arabia.

His bold and distinctive style, manifest across his painting, animation, installation and performance work, features idiosyncratic motifs. Extra sets of eyes and noses and his signature 'piano teeth' abound, as do animals, cities, *Sesame Street* characters and references to fast food chains. Roberts' personal experiences, such as managing anxiety, are also part of the story his portraits tell.

Showcasing over 100 works spanning his prolific, decade-long career to date, the exhibition will feature painting, installation and animation, as well as major new work, inviting audiences to consider the world through his eyes. Within the exhibition visitors will be greeted with a wall of emotion cards, sculptural cityscapes, and be invited to play a game of ping-pong in a performative work that examines the power dynamics of the courtroom.

"The work of Thom Roberts is exciting, delightful and complex. He does portraiture his own way but honours its storytelling purpose, building connections between objects and people, art and ideas, and stretching how expansive a portrait can be," said **Bree Pickering, National Portrait Gallery Director**. "Thom has featured in several important exhibitions including multiple Archibald Prizes. We are thrilled to present his first solo exhibition."

Exhibition curator and **Director of Curatorial and Collection at the National Portrait Gallery, Isobel Parker Philip** said "Thom engages with the idea of portraiture literally – he paints people, and makes sculptures, animation, drawings and photocopied collages about people – but portraiture, in the context of Thom's work, is about more than subject matter. It is about how we interface and interrelate with everything around us."

Roberts' work has been featured in high profile group exhibitions, including The National 2019: New Australian Art and several Archibald prizes, most recently with *Big Bamm Bamm* of artist Ken Done. He has undertaken residencies at Carriageworks, Bundanon Trust,

Canberra Glassworks and Società Raffaello Sanzio (Cesana, Italy). In 2023, he presented 'How to be an artist until you are a very old man' at the College Art Association Conference in New York, which influenced his subsequent exhibition *Pink Panther Station*. Roberts works with Studio A, a supported studio that creates professional pathways for artists with lived experience of intellectual disability.

The Immersive World of Thom Roberts, 12 April – 20 July 2025. Free entry.

IMAGES:

<https://dams.portrait.gov.au/lightbox.php?l=2409>

p/w: NPG

Image captions:

- Thom Roberts with *Burt the Oscar Train* 2017 and cushion cover. Photo: Rick Carter, Studio One Another

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