

Sjraar van Heugten

with contributions by
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VAN GOGH

AND THE SEASONS

We would like to dedicate this exhibition and publication
to Dr Robert Edwards AO

As Founding Director and Chief Executive of Art Exhibitions Australia, Bob Edwards set new standards for Australia in the field of international art exhibitions. He travelled tirelessly to persuade museum directors in Europe and the United States to become lenders, while enticing international scholars to act as curators. Few who met Bob failed to warm to the charm of his personality, or to succumb to the persistence of his advocacy. His cultural diplomacy established a network of goodwill and friendship that has helped change the way

Australia is viewed internationally. Specifically, relationships established during work on the *Van Gogh: His Sources, Genius and Influence* exhibition of 1993 have borne further fruit in such exhibitions as *Rembrandt: A Genius and His Impact* in 1997 and *Dutch Masters from the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam* in 2005. And they do so again in this new, amplified and differently focused narrative of the art of Van Gogh.

But the affection and respect in which Bob Edwards is held in Australia owes as much to another very different set of achievements. The role of exhibition impresario belongs, we might say, to the autumn of his career. It follows a South Australian spring spent as archaeologist, anthropologist and curator. During that time Bob helped lay the foundations for a new understanding, acceptance and appreciation of Aboriginal culture, both in Australia and overseas. This work led to his appointment as Deputy Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and later as Founding Director of the Aboriginal Arts Board of Australia. There followed a Victorian summer during which Bob realised his ambitious vision for the Museum Victoria, serving as the Founding Director of that institution from 1984 to 1989.

Much of Bob Edwards's work has been undertaken behind the scenes, self-effacingly but persistently, persuading the right people with the right arguments to do the right thing.

Characteristic of the last phase of his career has been his capacity as chair, or trustee, or consultant, or simply as friend and mentor, to steer the development of a bewildering range of Australian institutions. These include the South Australian Museum, the Western Australian Museum, the National Portrait Gallery and the National Museum of Australia.

Few individuals in any country can ever have contributed more or more diversely to the cultural life of their fellow citizens. Bob Edwards has done this while leaving in his wake an international community of friends and colleagues drawn together by their desire to honour both the man and his values.

