

## Auckland Art Gallery opens to the world during global lockdown with new virtual gallery experience



Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki Director Kirsten Paisley says the Gallery is open to all Aucklanders, New Zealanders and, in fact, anyone in the world, via a new digital exhibition platform launching today.

'We are thrilled to invite art lovers in New Zealand and from around the world to access a once-in-a-lifetime exhibition, available now via our new digital platform. While you can't replace the human experience of being with art in-person, we have developed an alternate online experience that gives access, creates connections and brings *Enchanted Worlds* to our audiences, wherever in the world they may be.'

Auckland Art Gallery launches its digital exhibition platform with the major exhibition *Enchanted Worlds: Hokusai, Hiroshige and the Art of Edo Japan*, now available as an interactive virtual tour at [aucklandartgallery.com/enchantedworlds](https://aucklandartgallery.com/enchantedworlds).

*Enchanted Worlds* is the first exhibition of original paintings by the leading artists and schools of Japan's Edo period (1603–1868) to be held in New Zealand. But, just two weeks after its opening, Auckland Art Gallery was required to close the exhibition's doors as part of New Zealand's response to the global outbreak of COVID-19.

This new virtual tour platform transforms the Gallery's exhibition into an engaging digital experience with in-depth interpretation, high-resolution digital reproductions and immersive soundtrack.

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Viewed via a web browser on computer, tablet or smartphone devices, users are able to choose between three different tour experiences: a family tour with fun facts and art-making activities; a curator's highlight tour that covers insights and stories on Edo-period poetry, music, theatre, fashion and visual arts; or an in-depth exhibition experience with extended artwork labels.

Using navigation tools to virtually 'walk' through gallery spaces, users can explore *Enchanted Worlds* via high-resolution digital images offering close-up views of the intricate, hand-painted details of over 70 exquisite and rare artworks, including delicate silk paintings, precious scrolls and vibrant folding screens. Future updates to the tour are planned with further features to include te reo Māori translations and an audio tour.

*Enchanted Worlds* curator and Japanese art scholar Rosella Menegazzo says: 'As a curator, what makes a perfect exhibition is a good selection of artworks, the creation of a captivating space to show them, and a special story. These three things together make for a transformative experience for the public. Having the opportunity to share *Enchanted Worlds: Hokusai, Hiroshige and the Art of Edo Japan* and its very fragile Japanese paintings, with such a wide public, globally, is a most beautiful and challenging experience.'

Auckland Art Gallery's virtual tour platform has been developed by local multimedia content producers Post Mag and Break The Fourth. Post Mag Director James McGregor-Macdonald says, 'While art-based virtual reality experiences aren't a new technology, the *Enchanted Worlds* virtual tour is setting a world standard in design, presentation and immersion. Collaborating with Auckland Art Gallery's team, we were able to build a virtual tour interface that gives the user a cinematic digital experience not seen before in an art context.'

Kirsten Paisley adds, 'It was difficult to close the Gallery, knowing that we were locking away exhibitions and spaces that are integral to our role in connecting audiences with art and ideas. *Enchanted Worlds* was an exhibition that would have existed in the Gallery for a brief time, but now anyone can access it anytime.'

*Enchanted Worlds: Hokusai, Hiroshige and the Art of Edo Japan* has been curated by Japanese scholar, Rosella Menegazzo (Università degli Studi di Milano Statale), in collaboration with Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki curators Dr Sophie Matthiesson and Emma Jameson, and is organised by MondoMostre, Italy.

The presentation of this exhibition has been supported by QMS and The Breeze.

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