

Impact Report 2024


**Your support.
Our stories.
Their success.**

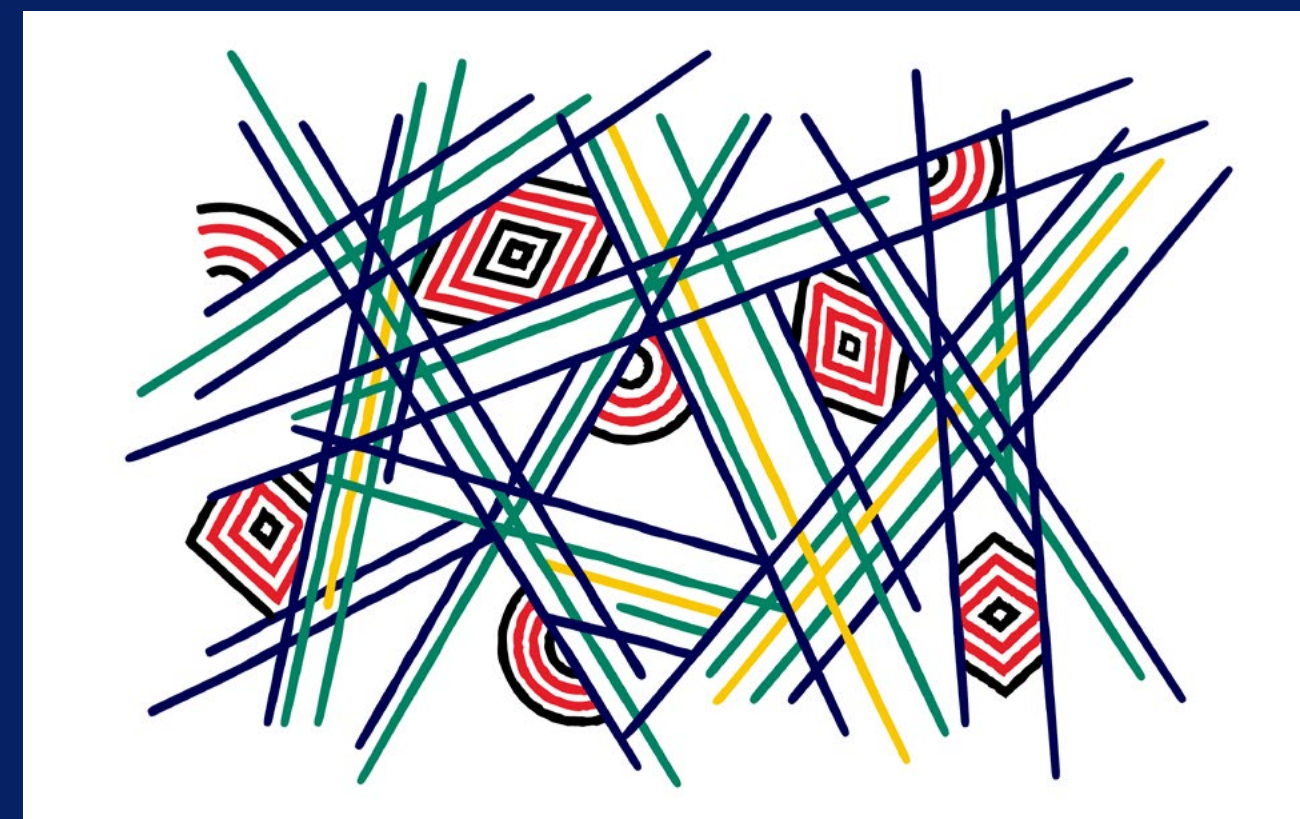


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Acknowledgement of Country

 RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University. RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present. RMIT also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business.



Artwork 'Sentient' by Hollie Johnson
Hollie is a Gunaikurnai and Monero Ngarigo woman from Gippsland who graduated from RMIT with a BA in Photography in 2016.

Cover image: Distinguished Professors Magdalena Plebanski and Suresh Bhargava AM, whose research is set to transform the diagnosis and treatment of ovarian cancer. See page 8.

Message from the Vice-Chancellor

As I say, year-on-year, I continue to be immensely proud of RMIT's contribution to advancing the lives of our students; to solving society's most pressing challenges; and to our contribution to the future of the communities where we operate. In 2024, social, economic and geopolitical challenges gave us cause to reflect on what we stand for, during a time when our contribution is more urgent than ever before.

Hundreds of thousands of skilled, knowledgeable workers will be needed in the decades ahead to support Australia's economy and provide care in our community. This demand will not be met solely through a focus on increasing participation of school leavers, and to do so would overlook a substantial group of Australians from backgrounds not traditionally involved in tertiary education.

As you know, at RMIT we're driven to level the playing field. This is why we believe that the true opportunity for Australia, and for our University, lies in improving accessibility for a wider range of learners from under-represented equity cohorts and working adults. For different reasons, both groups face high barriers to entry and success, and are significantly impacted by cost-of-living pressures.

Our scholarship programs exist because of our donor community, and they have never been more critical.

Your support for wide-ranging projects across sectors is also invaluable. Thanks to your vision and generosity, project PANDA is exploring how acupuncture can be used to provide drug-free pain relief in emergency departments; the Safety and Health Innovation Network (SHINe) is undertaking revolutionary research to improve the experience of work in the construction industry; and, as we celebrated The Capitol's 100th birthday, we moved closer to one day being able to reinstall the theatre's historic Wurlitzer organ, Eliza.

My appreciation to all, for your ongoing engagement with RMIT, and for your transformative contributions as donors, partners and mentors. Your appreciation of our mission and your support in ways large and small, makes a lasting difference in the lives of so many. You are part of an extraordinary network, and it is the enduring nature of these relationships that form the foundation of a strong community and validate our perennial purpose every day.



Yours sincerely,



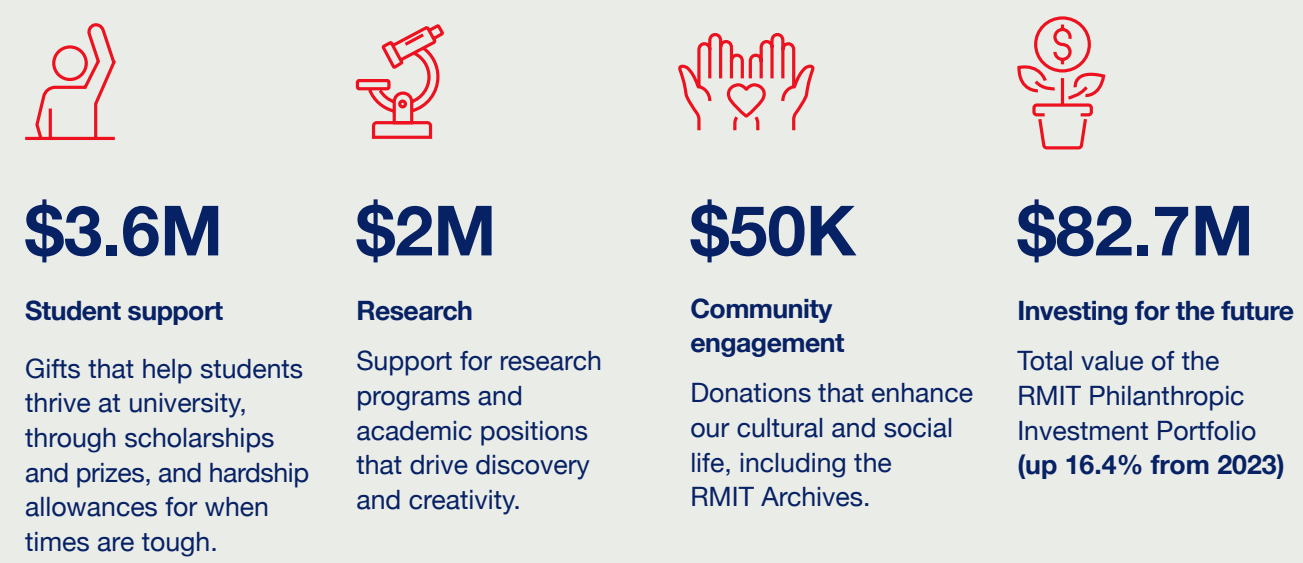
Professor Alec Cameron
Vice-Chancellor and President
RMIT University

A year of giving



The difference you've made

Your generosity allows us to support students and researchers, and progress initiatives that benefit our communities.



Funding comes from donations and investment earnings.



Building a new future from the ground up

As ISIS's campaign of terror threw Iraq into violent turmoil, Fadi Hanna's family fled to safety in Australia. Fadi, 24, who graduated from the Bachelor of Civil Engineering in 2024, and his mum, Valantina Kharbuoosh, share how the Northcote Trust Scholarship has helped the whole family thrive in their new life.

Fadi:

As Christians living in Iraq we were always an easy target for Muslim extremists. My parents had enough of running away from war, hiding and not knowing when it was going to be our last day. There was no future left for myself and my brothers Alfred, 20, and Fedrek, 17. The only choice we had was to flee to Lebanon and seek asylum from there to get to Australia, where we had some family. We only had three days to prepare and get out.

In Lebanon, I had no school for five months. I forced myself to learn English so by the time I got here, I was ready to keep going with school. I was 15 when we arrived. My parents relied heavily on me to help them get what they needed, especially my dad. He can't understand English as well as my mum but she learned faster than anybody else.

In April 2019 I was in year 12 and I had to have surgery on my back which took months to heal. While I was going through that I also had to help my parents with their studies at TAFE and my brothers with their schoolwork. This limited the amount of time I had to focus on myself, which led to me having a bad ATAR.

My school's career counsellor suggested that I do a diploma in engineering as a pathway to an undergraduate degree — that way my ATAR didn't matter.

I started the Advanced Diploma of Engineering Technology in 2020 and within the first three months we were told not to come because of COVID-19. When that happened, we didn't know what to do. Mum was taking care of everything. I saw the struggle and thought, "I gotta do something." But I had no job and no income.

Then RMIT sent me an email telling me there were scholarships I could apply for. The Northcote Trust Scholarship matched me best so I filled out the form and forgot about it. When I received the email telling me I was accepted I was praising God! It was perfect timing.

Mum taught me how to budget so I had money for buying books and paying for things like the internet. Sometimes I paid for groceries when my mum was sick and she couldn't cook at home. I started the Bachelor of Civil Engineering (Civil and Infrastructure) in 2022. I was also working casual hours during my first

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internship with [civil engineering firm] Fulton Hogan. When I got close to the end of the internship, I was asked if I wanted to stay — of course, I accepted. From there, I had to manage uni, work and life all at the same time.

I was working approximately five days on top of uni and everybody — including my mentors — were telling me to enjoy life, but I was determined to balance both, no matter what. I tell my brothers to keep going forward, keep pushing yourself. That's what our parents taught us from the beginning.

It got to a point halfway through 2023 where my university load got too much and I had to take time off work. But when uni was on a break, I worked as much as I could. With the internship and scholarship, I didn't need to do any other work. I built up experience and my network in the industry quickly.

"I'm grateful for this whole experience: uni, the scholarship, my internship and the opportunity to come to Australia. It's like a butterfly effect where one thing touches another thing and the whole narrative changes."

Fadi Hanna

We had tried to come to Australia in 2015 but we were rejected and had to go back to Iraq and apply again. When we got the call in 2016, we knew we only had one shot — we would not be able to try again. That's why I'm so grateful. Like my mum says, "We always try until we get the results. Once we get the results, we just go and try harder for a different thing."

Valantina:

I was a vice-principal in a high school in my country. I have faith in education and health: they are always a priority. If you have a degree, you can go places. Yes, it will take time, yes it will be challenging, but at the end of the day you can do it.

We left Iraq in August 2016 and went to Lebanon, where we had to wait five months to get our humanitarian visa. We came to Australia on 24 January 2017.

At first, I studied English, then I did a Certificate III and IV in business administration and accounting and got a job as an education counsellor. My husband, Fuad, and I attended English classes together but it was harder for him to get a job. Before, he worked in sales, but he can't do that here because of the language. He's a good driver so he decided to be an Uber driver which he enjoys and he gets to practise English.

Fadi needed surgery when he was in year 12. If he had needed the surgery in Iraq, he would not have got a good enough score to go to university. In Iraq you only get one chance. There are no alternative pathways to a degree like there are here. When Fadi started an Advanced Diploma of Civil Engineering at RMIT, that was a very proud thing for us. We were really lucky. The timing was everything.

In 2020 I was working full time but when the COVID lockdowns happened they reduced our hours. Then I got COVID before the vaccines and I was very sick. The government helped out a bit, but it was very hard.

The scholarship came at the perfect time. There were lots of bills to pay and I was the only one working at that time, so it was hard for us to survive. Fadi could pay for whatever he needed to keep going and save something so he could help the family.

Now, Fadi does everything. I can drive but he's always saying, "Mum, don't think about it. I'll pick you up and drop you off whenever you want." He's very thoughtful and helpful.

When Alfred saw Fadi getting a job he was so proud; encouraging him to do more and keep going. When Fadi sees Alfred doing something he will say "I'm proud of you", but he will also tell him he can do more, like saving money or getting better grades in school. They are very competitive but they also encourage each other. Fedrek, who is now in year 12, is aiming to get a high ATAR so he can get direct entry to the Bachelor of Engineering.

My work now is dealing with international students getting offers from universities. My friends in Iraq say they are proud and sometimes jealous that I have this opportunity, but it's because I try. It's been hard learning English and I'm not perfect, but I try. I'm always telling my sons to try everything in life.

I'm so thankful to the Northcote Trust, RMIT and all the people who donate to scholarships. It's hard work to ask people to give you money when there is no benefit to them. The only benefit is knowing that they are helping people. If we had stayed in Iraq, a lot of bad, bad things could have happened.

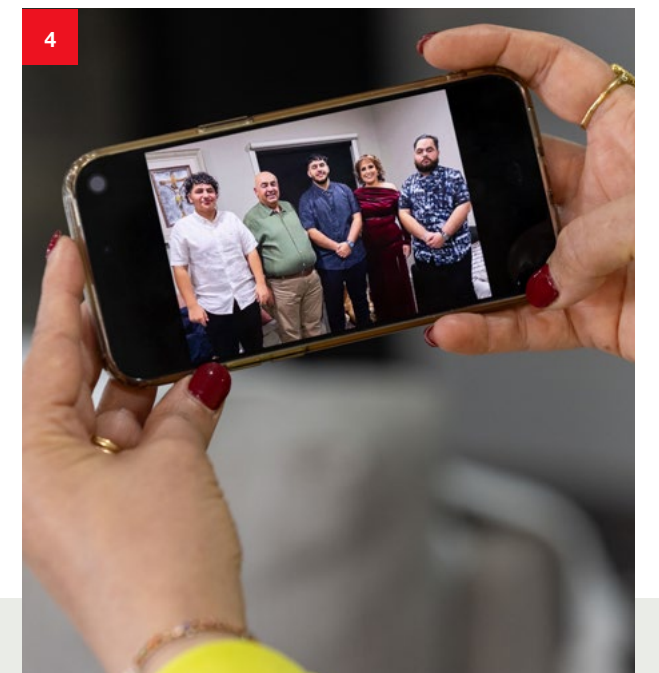
Students like Fadi have to be thankful that there is someone thinking of them. They have to remember that the money doesn't come easy, that people have to save to donate so that students can get their degree. I thank all the people who do good things like this.

The Northcote Trust has been supporting RMIT students since 2008. Northcote Trust Scholarships provide up to \$5,000 per year for students who have progressed or intend to progress from an RMIT diploma to an undergraduate degree in a similar field.

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- 1 A special bond: Fadi Hanna and Valentina Kharbuoosh at home in Melbourne.
- 2 On site: Fadi (right) with Fulton Hogan colleague Paul Buckley at Melbourne Airport.
- 3 Project planning: Fadi at Fulton Hogan's base at Melbourne Airport.
- 4 Family time: From left to right: Fedrek, Fuad, Alfred, Valentina, Fadi.



Striking gold in ovarian cancer research

RMIT researchers are developing breakthrough techniques to detect ovarian cancer earlier and personalise treatments

Ovarian cancer is an insidious disease. Incredibly difficult to diagnose in the early stages, it claims the lives of around 1000 Australian women every year.

But RMIT researchers are on track to change this. They are developing new techniques and therapies that have the potential to radically transform the diagnosis and treatment of this terrible cancer – and perhaps others in the future.

“We’re tackling this disease from three angles – early diagnosis, personalised treatments, and new therapies,” says Distinguished Professor Magdalena Plebanski, who leads the University’s Cancer, Ageing and Vaccines Laboratory (CAVA). “It’s an incredibly exciting time.”

The work of Professor Plebanski and her colleagues at CAVA is focused on finding solutions to major diseases through innovative research. They have identified diagnostic and prognostic biomarkers that appear in blood in the early stages of cancer development, well before a tumour can be detected with a conventional test or scan. They are working with nanoengineers to develop practical point-of-care devices to detect them.

Personalised medicine offers great possibilities for treatment. “We’re analysing the results of human clinical trials we’ve run with the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute over the last five years in 15 hospitals across Australia. These are phase two, randomised, double blind – the gold standard. Key aspects are based on our intellectual property at RMIT,” says Professor Plebanski.

“Determining the right treatment for each individual can dramatically increase survival rates but knowing which drug to give to each patient, based on the genetics of the tumour, is painful, expensive and difficult. Now, our studies aim to personalise treatment based on a drop of blood.”

Professor Plebanski is also Director of the Accelerator for Translational Research and Clinical Trials (ATRAC) Centre at RMIT, which brings academics with a diverse range of cancer expertise to work together on research.

This includes Distinguished Professor Suresh Bhargava AM and his team at the Centre for Advanced Materials and Industrial Chemistry (CAMIC), who are pioneering a breakthrough in cancer treatment with gold-based metallo-drugs. Their cutting-edge compound has demonstrated an 82 per cent reduction in tumour growth in animal studies – far exceeding traditional chemotherapy. Importantly, it achieves this without debilitating side effects, offering a powerful new hope in the fight against drug-resistant cancers.

Close collaboration across disciplines is central to this project’s success. The new drugs being developed by researchers at CAMIC can be translated into real products by researchers at CAVA, who test how the drugs act against diverse cancers, including ovarian.

None of this research would be possible without substantial philanthropic support. Pallion subsidiary ABC Bullion has committed to donating 250g of pure gold to Professor Bhargava’s project annually, while a host of generous donors are supporting the work led by Professor Plebanski.

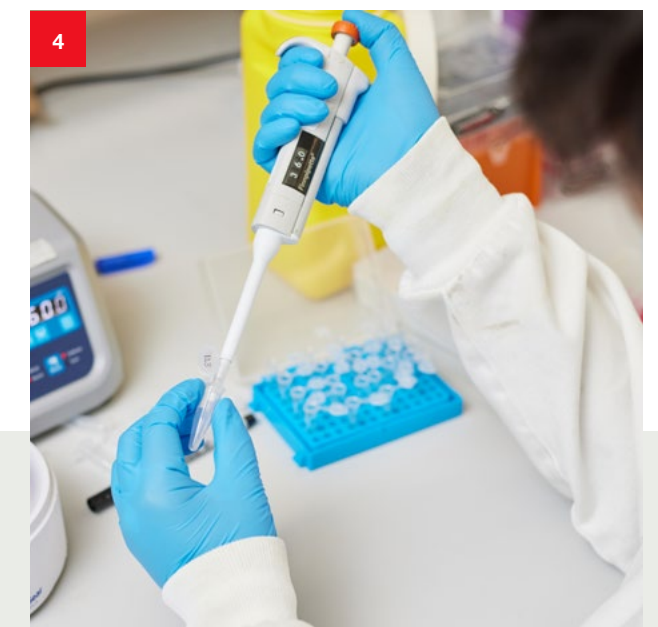


“Our vision is to ensure a future where ovarian cancer is detected earlier and treatment is personalised, more effective, and less harmful to patients.”

Professor Magdalena Plebanski

“Our research goes beyond curing disease,” adds Professor Bhargava. “It is about transforming lives – empowering patients to live fully, free from the suffering of outdated treatments.”

“It embodies hope, resilience, and the unwavering belief that innovation, guided by wisdom, has the power to change the world.”



- 1 Teamwork: Research Assistant Cyril Deceneux, Senior Technical Assistant Georgia Goodchild and PhD candidate Namita Yadav in the CAVA Laboratory at RMIT’s Bundoora campus.
- 2 Trailblazers in cancer research: Distinguished Professors Magdalena Plebanski and Suresh Bhargava AM.
- 3 Golden opportunity: Research using this precious metal is delivering promising results.
- 4 Research in action: PhD candidate Emily Cassar working with ovarian cancer patient samples collected as part of a clinical trial.



Home is where the art is

RMIT's Artothek Collection is helping students to engage with art in a new way.

Imagine visiting a lending library where instead of borrowing a book, you can take home a precious artwork to hang on your lounge room wall.

Thanks to a gift from Dr Christoph Dahlhausen and growing support from our donor community, RMIT students can do exactly that.

Dr Dahlhausen, an RMIT Adjunct Professor of Fine Art, proposed the idea of an art lending library — known as an artothek — in 2020. He donated around 250 of his works on paper to start the collection.

Artotheks have existed in Germany, where Dr Dahlhausen is based, since the late 1960s. RMIT's is the first in Australia to be dedicated to students.

Dr Dahlhausen says he is deeply honoured to have contributed to the program's establishment.

"Experiencing art is close to reading. Having artwork at home opens up the possibility to 'read' slowly and sustainably," he says.

"I hope that the RMIT Artothek will continue to grow, leading the way while bringing joy and enriching experiences to all."

Based on a membership model, Artothek is only available to current RMIT students. Loan periods are aligned with the academic calendar, offering two loan rounds annually — at a cost of \$40 per year — for accepted participants.

Participants are selected on a first-come, first-served basis and funds raised from the loans are invested back into the scheme.

Before students take the artwork home, they're given clear instructions on how to take care of it by collections staff. This includes how to transport it safely, guidance on where and how to hang it, and steps to take if things go wrong. They are also asked to sign a legal agreement that protects both parties.

But the handover is about more than risk management. It is an opportunity for the students to go behind the scenes at a real museum and learn how to handle, pack and display artworks.

Elizabeth Marsden, Manager of Cultural Collections at RMIT, says the program aligns well with RMIT's reputation for art and design and longstanding commitment to student wellbeing.

"Artothek embodies RMIT's values of inclusion, imagination, and impact," she says.

"Art is often for the wealthy, but Artothek provides a chance for deeper, authentic art interactions. It boosts student wellbeing and builds trust between the collections staff and students."

Elizabeth Marsden

"Artothek has also helped RMIT collections staff redefine our purpose. It goes beyond just managing the collections. By putting students first, the program has encouraged greater innovation through discomfort, resulting in a program with measurable social impact that enhances the importance of RMIT's significant cultural assets and their relevancy to the wider organisation."

Since its official launch in early 2024, RMIT Artothek has facilitated 22 art loans. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Student Aletta De Jong borrowed Peter Stampfli's *Untitled* (no date). "As an interstate student, having an artwork in my home would be difficult to achieve, but the Artothek program has made it accessible," she says.

"Seeing an artwork every day in my home is a different experience than viewing it in a gallery, and I am grateful to experience it."

For Jidapha Wannalee, who borrowed Damien Hirst's *Untitled (dots)* (no date) the experience was similarly positive. "The Artothek program has meant a lot to me this year," she says.

"It allows RMIT students to enjoy art at home, offering numerous benefits like reducing stress, stimulating creativity, and fostering connections with others. It has significantly enhanced the ambience in my space and improved my wellbeing."

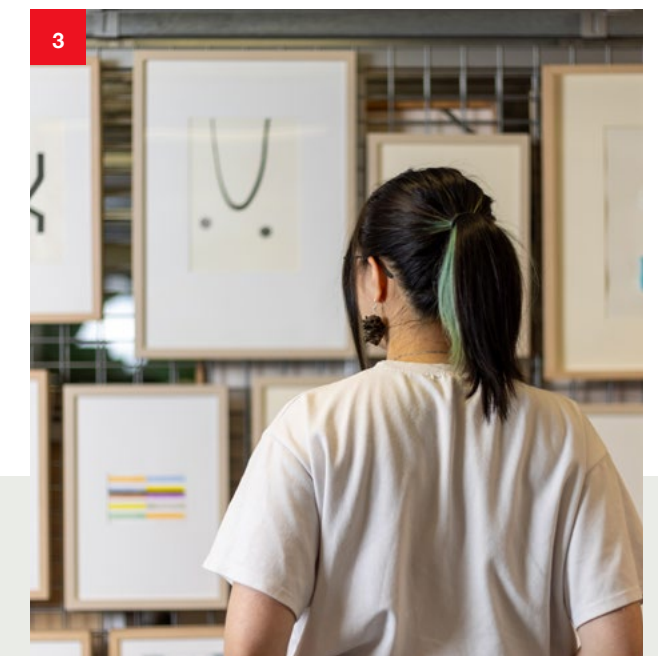
The value of the Artothek program has not gone unnoticed. In October, the program won the 2024 Victorian Museum and Galleries Award for 'Small Project of the Year (Museum)'.

The judges noted: "By fostering deep engagement with art and supporting student wellbeing, the program has opened new opportunities for collections staff and demonstrated a groundbreaking approach to risk management, all while enhancing community engagement and making art more accessible. The program's thoughtful design and strong impact have redefined how cultural assets are shared and appreciated within the University."

Elizabeth Marsden is confident that Dr Dahlhausen's dream for the program to grow is on track. "Our 2025 Artothek program will see an expanded offering of available works as well as a trial staff program. While our students will always come first, opening up the program more broadly will provide opportunities for staff to enjoy its benefits and contribute to its ongoing development."

She adds that the collections team are grateful for Dr Dahlhausen's generosity, and the community support the program has received.

"The measurable impact the program has had on student wellbeing demonstrates the importance and wider positive impact RMIT's art collection has on campus life and student university experiences."



- 1 Thinking outside the frame: Collections Assistant Grace Mooney, who manages the Artothek program.
- 2 Culture on campus: Art Collection Officer Kate O'Connor and Grace Mooney explore RMIT's art stores.
- 3 Decision time: Students can choose a work that suits their home environment.

Continuing your support

We value your contribution to the work of RMIT. Your generosity changes lives.

Give online or by telephone

To support priority projects, visit rmit.edu.au/giving or call +61 3 9925 5220.

Tailored gifts

If you are considering a bespoke gift that could make a significant difference, please contact us to discuss how we can turn your passion into impact.

Gifts in Wills

Leaving a gift to RMIT in your Will is a beautiful way of ensuring that the causes you believe in are supported beyond your lifetime. If you have included RMIT in your Will, or are considering doing so, please contact us.

Simple online Wills can be made through RMIT's trusted partner, Gathered Here. Scan the QR code to learn more.



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