



Media Release

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## Design Treasures On Show in Adelaide One of the Largest Exhibitions of Morris & Co Pieces Mounted Outside of Britain

From **21 November 2002** to **26 March 2003** The Art Gallery of South Australia will exhibit one of the largest collections of world famous **Morris & Co** furnishings to be seen outside of Britain.

Entitled **Morris & Co** (the name of William Morris's London firm which operated in various incarnations from 1861 - 1940) the exhibition will feature more than 100 pieces including furniture, carpets, tapestries, wallpapers, embroideries and tiles from the hey day of Morris production in the 1880 and 1890s. It will also feature lavishly produced books from the *Kelmscott Press*.

Curated by **Christopher Menz**, *Senior Curator Decorative Arts (International)* at the *National Gallery of Victoria*, **Morris & Co** comprises the Art Gallery of South Australia's complete collection of William Morris pieces, (most originally purchased directly from the firm to decorate Adelaide houses during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century), together with loaned items from other public and private collections. The exhibition also includes recent Gallery acquisitions from London that have not previously been displayed and marks the first time the Gallery's vast Morris collection has been displayed in its entirety.

William Morris (1834 - 1896) was one of the greatest pattern designers of all time and became the most influential British interior designer of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries enjoying an international reputation and clientele. *Morris & Co* gained recognition at the London *International Exhibition* of 1862, and this success brought substantial commissions including designs for the interiors for at **St James's Palace**, London in 1866-67 and the beautiful Green Dining Room (now the Morris Room) at the **Victoria and Albert Museum**, in 1867.

Morris's designs, inspired by the Gothic period and medieval art, in which natural forms, flowers and animals are always discernible, came to be regarded as a 'true English style'. His patterns have been constantly revived since the 1960s with many designs still available today. The Morris philosophy of handmade quality and a return to individual workers completing all stages of production meant that even though William Morris was a socialist, only the very rich could afford these opulent handcrafted pieces

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Morris's private press, the Kelmscott Press, for which he designed many of the typefaces and borders also set new standards for high-quality book production.

The Art Gallery of South Australia has a special association with the work of William Morris. The **Barr Smith** family of Adelaide - Australia's richest at the time – became *Morris & Co's* biggest customers.

From 1889 to 1929 the Barr Smith's furnished seven huge homes (over three generations) almost entirely in Morris designed and handmade works - they also commissioned many individual pieces.

In 1917 the Art Gallery of South Australia purchased a version of Morris' famous ecclesiastical tapestry design *The Adoration of the Magi*. *Morris & Co.'s* tapestries were the high point and most ambitious undertaking of the firm's textile production and this piece now forms the centrepiece of the Art Gallery of South Australia's extensive *Morris & Co.* collection.

In 1982 the first Barr Smith original furnishings were donated to the Gallery and since then a large quantity of the family's furnishings have been acquired through gift and purchase.

The most elaborate catalogue ever produced by the Art Gallery of South Australia will complement the exhibition and sell for \$59.95.

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**Art Gallery of South Australia North Terrace, Adelaide Open 10 am – 5 pm every day**  
[www.artgallery.sa.gov.au](http://www.artgallery.sa.gov.au)

Admission:	
Adult	\$ 10
Concession	\$ 8
Member	\$ 6
Students 16 and over	\$ 4
Children under 16	free entry

A range of activities including from the Art Gallery's Public Program including talks, tours and a schools support program will complement the exhibition.