

Media Release – Thursday 1 July 2004
for immediate release



DONORS SECURE RARE JAPANESE SCREENS FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The rarest pair of Japanese screens in Australia will be revealed at 11:30 am today as the major new acquisition at the Art Gallery of South Australia.

Millet and Birds a spectacular pair of screens of the Unkoku school, dating from the first half of the 17th Century, is a recent gift to the Gallery by local benefactors, Andrew and Hiroko Gwinnett.

Art Gallery Chairman, Michael Abbott QC says “we believe these to be the rarest Japanese screens in Australia and the crowning glory in the Japanese screen collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia”.

“There was considerable interest from a number of other international art museums in acquiring this work” says Abbott who adds that “without generous private donors like Andrew and Hiroko Gwinnett, South Australia may well have missed this significant opportunity”. There are only two other Unkoku screens outside Japan featuring this unique theme. One belongs to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the other to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

Featuring extensive use of gold leaf, the exquisitely painted screens depict birds flying against golden fields towards autumn crops of millet and bamboo. The screens belong to the *shiki-e* or *four seasons pictures* genre which feature the changing seasons as symbols of the transience and fragility of life.

This is the fourth pair of screens given by the Gwinnetts to the Gallery in recent years. Their gifts dramatically strengthen the Gallery’s Japanese art collection making it one of the most significant in the country both in size and quality.

The display of *Millet and Birds* will be launched by Michael Abbott, with Andrew and Hiroko Gwinnett at 11:30am today downstairs in the Asian Galleries.

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