

Eye for an icon catches \$13,000 doughnut

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Retinal surgeon Vicky Lu has a particularly quirky reason for spending \$13,000, sight unseen, on one of the iconic Sydney Opera House “doughnuts” at auction.

“I guess I have a fetish,” she says. “I like round things – that’s why I am an eye doctor.”

As well as a passion for all things circular, she also loves the Opera House.

“When we first came to Australia – I’m Taiwanese – we used to go around the Opera House and dream about going inside,” she says. “And then it was when I was singing in the school choir there I started thinking ‘what are these plastic things at the top?’”

“I guess the Opera House has been sort of intertwined with me as I’ve grown up and been able to afford better seats up the front and go to live concerts.”

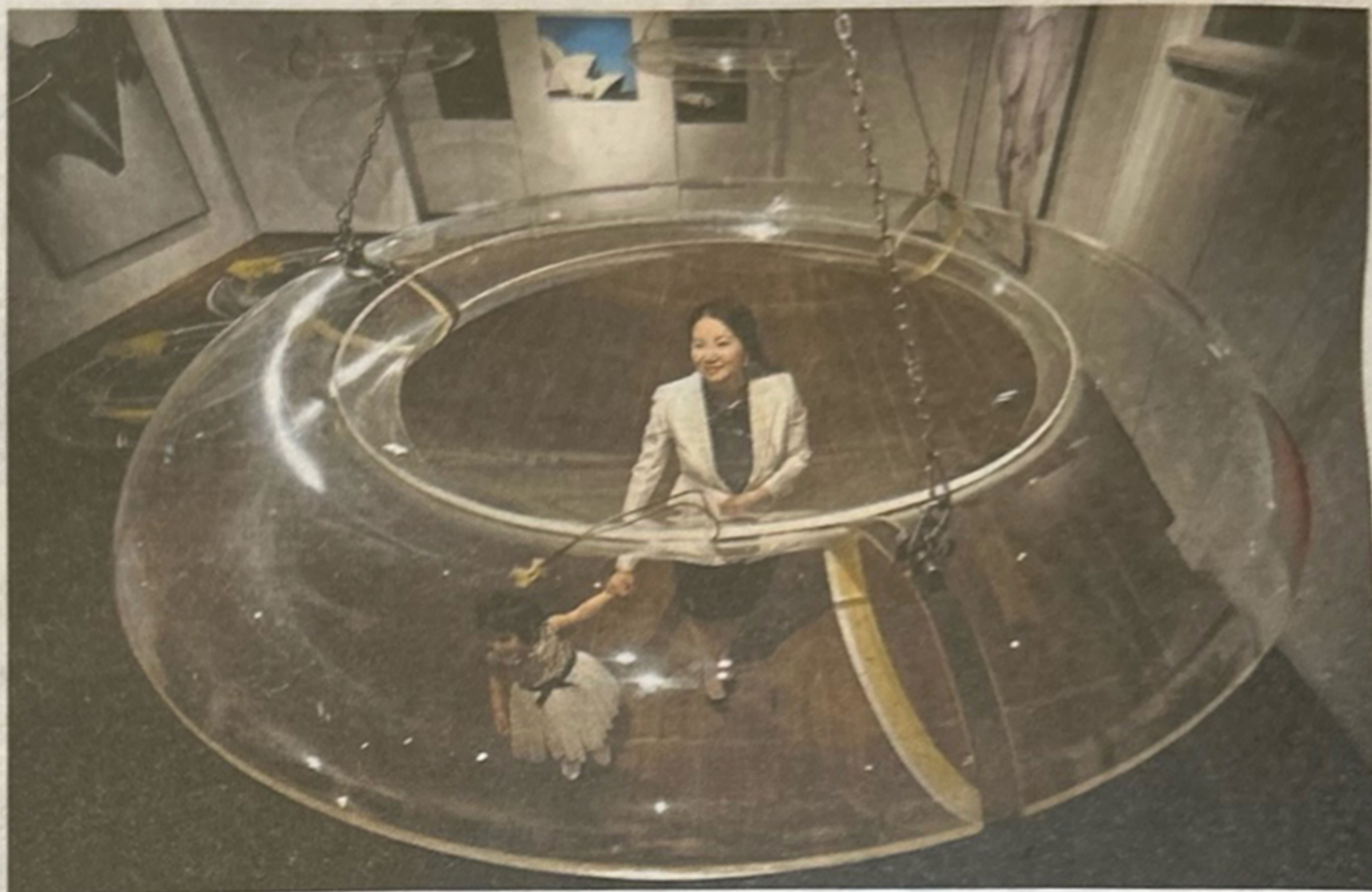
In total, nine of the 1.7-metre diameter acrylic acoustic reflectors were auctioned by Woollahra auction house Leonard Joel. Each of the mushrooms smashed their estimated sale price of \$3000 to \$5000. One fetched \$15,000. The buyers were a mix of private individuals and businesses and, in total, the sale realised \$108,000.

“I didn’t have a chance to go see them so we had a look at some pictures online and I thought, ‘maybe I’ll try my luck,’” says Lu.

“I was actually operating at the time and it was a very long case and I thought I better put in a bid for three and I chose numbers one, six and eight, my lucky numbers. Then I thought, ‘Crap, if I win all three it’s going to absolutely bankrupt me.’”

She got doughnut number six.

Since being installed in 1972, the 21 acoustic reflectors have permeated the



Vicky Lu with her daughter, Chloe, and her Sydney Opera House doughnut; Danish acoustics expert Vilhelm Jordon during the installation of the doughnuts in the concert hall in 1972. Photo: Janie Barrett

popular imagination, variously nicknamed “lifesavers” and “calamari rings” as well as the more popular doughnut.

In 2020, they were finally permanently retired in the \$150 million renovation of the concert hall. They have been replaced by 18 acoustic “petals” finished in a semi-gloss magenta, matching the seat colour. These “petals” can be individually positioned for the best acoustic response, depending on the style of music being played.

Of course, the \$13,000 question for Lu is what she will do with her latest circular acquisition.

“Initially, I thought I would have it on the wall but I don’t know how heavy it is,” she says. “I think I’m going to have to come up with a way of incorporating it in the ceiling, sort of like a pendant light.”