REFRAMING

A Critical Appraisal of the Parliament House Rotational Collection of Contemporary Australian Art 1980–2024

Robert Miller

First published in 2026
Second edition 2026
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National Library of Australia Cataloguing -in -Publication entry

Author: Robert Miller
Title: Reframing: A Critical Appraisal of the Parliament House Rotational Collection of Contemporary Australian Art 1980–2024
Edition: Second ed.
ISBN: 978-1-7645871-1-2

Editorial advisor for the first edition John Carrick.

This book has been published free of charge.

Members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communites are respectfully informed that some of the people mentioned in writing have died.

Particular thanks go to Katrina Rumley.
Design by Dynasty Marketing and Communications.

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By Robert Miller

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Introduction

I have written this book to draw attention to a significant yet little-known cultural treasure: the Rotational Collection of Contemporary Australian Art at Parliament House, Canberra.

The collection, established for some 40 years to the time of writing, is effectively inaccessible to the public despite ultimately being publicly funded. The works in the collection are displayed in the general circulation areas and in parliamentarians' offices and suites within the secure parts of Parliament House. No catalogue has been published since 1993, and few public exhibitions have been held. The Parliament collection thus resembles a corporate collection and mainly benefits people who work in the building. The collection is the responsibility of the presiding officers (the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate) arising from their duties to control the parliamentary precincts and is managed by the Department of Parliamentary Services.[1]

This book is based on a doctoral research project I did at the University of Sydney, finishing in 2024. The PhD thesis followed my diploma and master's studies in art history, also at Sydney University, which I undertook after retiring from my former career as a patent attorney.

The Rotational Collection is distinct from the Historic Memorials Collection. The Historic Memorials Collection, which comprises the official portraits of prime ministers, presiding officers and other dignitaries, can be explored via an official website.[2] Also separately conceived and executed are the architectural commissions, which are probably more familiar to the public when they think about art in Parliament: for example, the Forecourt mosaic, the Coats of Arms, and the Great Hall tapestry that is based on an Arthur Boyd painting. The commissions are 70 site-specific works of art and craft created during the construction phase (1981–88) and located in and around the Parliament building. A detailed account is in *Interwoven: The commissioned art and craft for Parliament House*, by Pamille Berg, the Art and Craft Co-ordinator for the architects Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp.[3]

This account of the Parliament collection's contents and history became possible because of the recent online publication by Department of Parliamentary Services, *Listing of artworks in the Parliament House Rotational Collection*.[4] The list (not available to me when writing my thesis) includes all the acquired works but no images. The collection comprised 3325 art objects in May 2025 (not including commissioned works). As of 30 June 2025, the collection was valued at $36 million.[5] Parliament's term "rotational" refers to the regular movement of works between display and storage, for conservation purposes. I use "contemporary" to mean recently created. All the works of art are by Australian artists.

There is limited other published literature about the Rotational Collection. A detailed discussion of the collection as initially established can be found in *Expressing Australia, Art in Parliament House,* written by John Carrick and the collection's inaugural curator Katrina Rumley, published by the Parliament House Construction Authority in 1988, the year of the building's official opening, and, with the same content in a revised format, by the Joint House Department, forerunner of Department of Parliamentary Services, in 1993.[6] Some aspects of the collection were covered in a quarterly Construction Authority newsletter called *Project Parliament*.[7] A memoir about the initial Art Program, titled "*There are better Whiteleys": Selecting works for Australia's premier public building, 1983–88*, was published under the National Library of Australia's edeposit service by Katrina Rumley in 2024 (after my thesis had been submitted for examination).[8]

Six internal reports examining the collection's history and purpose have been prepared at various times but are not readily available to the public: Julian Faigan's report (1990); Betty Churcher's report (2003); two background papers by Louise Dauth (November 2001 and January 2006); Philippa Lean's report (2009); and Roslyn Russell and Louise Douglas's report (2013).[9]

I aim to expand existing public knowledge about the founding Art

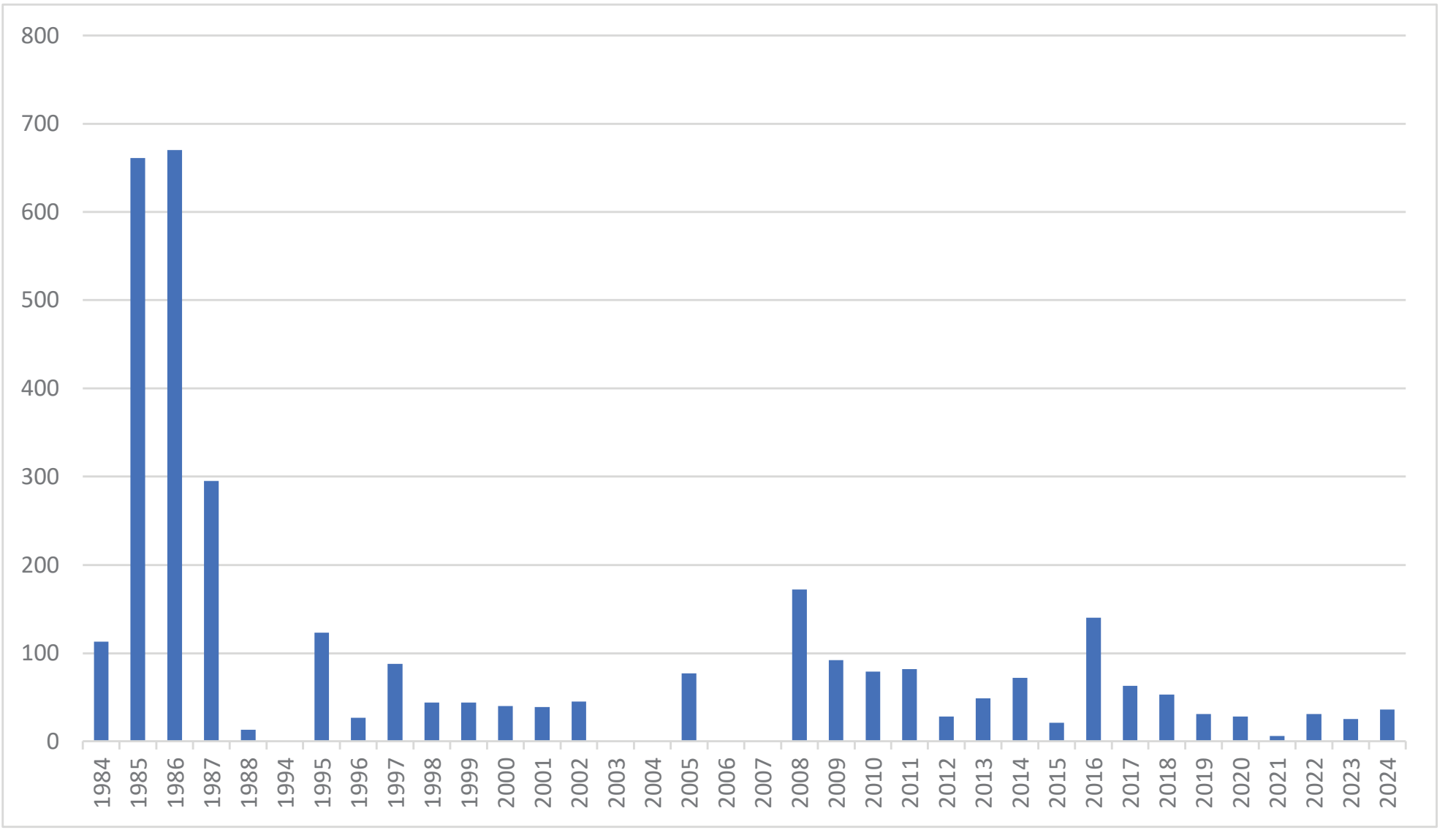


Figure 1. Number of acquisitions by year.

Program of 1982–88 and, for the first time, present details about the subsequent development of the Rotational Collection from 1989 to 2024. I primarily examine how the acquisition policy has changed over time and show highlights and lowlights along the way. And yet, amid this change and evolution of collecting policy, many highly significant works have been acquired.

The number of acquisitions by year has been compiled from the *Listing*, shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 demonstrates the off-and-on nature of acquisitions. The boom years of 1984–87 during the establishment stage greatly exceed the wilderness years of 1989–94. The pattern was repeated over the subsequent years, neatly paralleling changes of government. In Appendix 1, I have listed prime ministers, presiding officers and curators over time along with budget allocations or expenditure for acquisitions.

"One of the most exciting creative experiments in Australia's cultural history"

To collect contemporary art for a legislature was uncommon for its time. The European Parliament had incorporated contemporary art in a new Council building in Strasbourg in the early 1980s. This was achieved through the force of personality of that parliament's president Simone Veil. Something similar occurred in the New South Wales Parliament at about the same time, in large part due to the enthusiasm for contemporary art of the Minister of Public Works, Leon Punch. Neither of these precedents were on the scale of Australia's Parliament House and both relied on one individual's single mindedness. Set

squarely against this bourgeoning interest in contemporary art was a long-held institutional fear of artistic modernity. But defying such fear, one voice described the parliamentary art project as "one of the most exciting creative experiments in Australia's cultural history."[10]

The original aim of the Art Program was to purchase some 3000 art objects during the establishment stage. This goal was not fully achieved because of budget cuts to the New Parliament House Project made by Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1986, which reduced the Art Program budget by $3.1 million.

"The public deserves to know the history of the collection"

I argue that the works of art acquired during the establishment stage were of high aesthetic value, in large part produced contemporaneously by established artists, although accommodations were made to collect a small number of landscape paintings by well-established artists to satisfy the preferences of certain parliamentarians. The original acquisition policy aimed to select works that stimulated discussion while avoiding undue provocation. However, the ideals of the collection's instigators in the early 1980s have been manipulated in ways that facilitate parliamentarians' idiosyncratic preferences and particularly an abiding nostalgia for colonial-era landscape imagery. The subject matter of the works collected has been a creeping movement towards a middle ground, considered appropriate in a dignified legislative setting. Furthermore, the idea of a stimulating collection has been narrowed to suitability for general viewing, thereby tending to avert controversy.

However, despite the off-and-on nature of acquisitions, in my view the Rotational Collection contains many modern treasures. Furthermore, I believe strongly that the public deserves to know the history of the collection and the forces that shaped it.

Chapter 1:

Establishing the art collection, 1981–89

The design, construction and fit out of Parliament House comprised the largest and most expensive building project commissioned by the Australian Government since Federation. After seven years, the final cost of construction, landscaping and roadworks was $1.1 billion (equal to about $3 billion in 2024).

Construction was managed by the Parliament House Construction Authority, an entity established under special-purpose legislation in 1979.[11] The Construction Authority's role was "to act for and represent the Parliament, as the client for the new Parliament House, in all matters concerned with the planning, design and construction [thereof]".[12] Parliament, as the client, appointed the Joint Standing Committee on the New Parliament House, whose membership was drawn from sitting members and senators, and jointly chaired by the presiding officers. The principal design architect was Italian-born American Romaldo (Aldo) Giurgola of the architecture firm Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp.

The Standing Committee, Construction Authority and the architects were jointly responsible for executing the building's design, construction, landscaping and interiors, which included an Art Program. The Construction Authority established an Art Advisory Committee to implement the Art Program, which comprised the architectural and photographic commissions and the purchased works.

My sole concern in this account is the creation and evolution of the purchased works collection (which was the forerunner of the Rotational Collection).

The Construction Authority's initial primary responsibility to the Standing Committee was for the design and construction of Parliament House; the Construction Authority existed from 25 November 1980 to 19 February 1990.[13] The Standing Committee was formed with the presiding officers acting as joint chairs and comprised from nine to thirteen other members drawn from Labor, Liberal and National Party parliamentarians. Forty parliamentarians were involved over the 10 years of construction. The formal contractual document between the architects and the Construction Authority was known as the *Prime Agreement for Design*, dated 3 April 1981. Neither the Construction Authority nor the architects were originally responsible for what were known as the Non-Building Items. These included communications; security; sound, vision and other services; art and craft; furniture; recreation and maintenance equipment. The implication was that the interior fit-out was intended to be done after construction of the building had been completed. However, the Construction Authority felt that such an approach would place the intended opening date in doubt; as well, "[t]he Authority stressed the need for it to have an overall co-ordinating role so that the work could be sequenced with the building program."[14] Cabinet formally authorised a contractual variation with the architects in July 1982 to include some of the Non-Building Items.[15] This was known as the *Agreement for Interior Design*, and the Art Program that would evolve was stated only in general terms: "works of art/craft."[16]

The Construction Authority made a significant concession at an early stage about its members' and the architects' limited knowledge of Australian art and craft: "... neither organisation possessed the depth of understanding or expertise in the fields of Australian art and crafts to guarantee the excellence of the program."[17] The ground had been prepared for the Advisory Committee to be established. The original Committee membership became:

Chair: Sir Laurence Muir, a partner of Melbourne stockbroking firm Potter Partners for much of his working life and deeply involved in charitable and civic projects

Sir Joseph Burke, a distinguished art historian, originally from England, who established the study of art history as an academic discipline in Australia at the University of Melbourne in 1949, retiring in 1979[18]

James Mollison, who led the Australian National Gallery from 1971 to 1989, positioning the institution as a modernist public art museum[19]

Carl Andrew, Deputy Director of the Museum of Applied Arts and Science, Sydney, a foundation Board member of Artbank and a member of the Australia Council for the Arts' Crafts Board[20]

Tony Bishop, an artist and lecturer at Adelaide College of the Arts who had chaired the Australia Council's Visual Arts Board for three years; he resigned from the Committee in 1984 to take up a commission to design the marquetry panels in the Foyer and Cabinet suite

Darani Lewers, a silversmith and jeweller who chaired the Crafts Board of the Australia Council

John Baily, a watercolourist and Principal of Sydney College of the Arts who chaired the Visual Arts Board after Bishop

Don Dobie, a Federal MP for 25 years to 1996[21]

Ros Kelly, MP

Aldo Giurgola, an architect and teacher, holding a Chair in Architecture at Colombia University in New York as well as being a founding partner of the Mitchell/Giurgola firm before taking-on the Parliament House project,[22] and

Pam Berg, an observer who studied ancient art and archaeology before becoming the architects' Art and Craft Co-ordinator.

Construction Authority minutes (held by the National Archives of Australia) reveal that Giurgola had been asked to begin developing a theme for works of art immediately. As an initial step, architect and Construction Authority board member Sir John Overall consulted the Chancellor of the Australian National University, Sir John Crawford, to organise discussions that would allow Giurgola to "ask individuals from a variety of backgrounds what it meant to them to be Australian."[23] The first of four discussions took place on 12 November 1981 and involved Giurgola and partners Hal Guida and Richard Thorp, Sir John Overall, Construction Authority chair Sir Bernard Callinan, Construction Authority Deputy CEO JD (Iain) Fowler, and prominent academics from the Australian National University including R.W.V. Elliott (English), Peter Spearritt (History), D.W. Rawson (Political Science) and Dianna Howlett (Human Geography).

"A radical proposal within the politics of the time"

One aspect of the meeting's minutes stands out:

> An important consideration was the breadth and extent of the history to be portrayed, i.e., Parliament as an institution or Australia as a country since Aboriginal settlement; since colonised; or since Federation?[24]

This is an issue of the highest significance. To acknowledge the history to be portrayed as extending back to Aboriginal settlement was a radical proposal within the politics of the time.

"The Art Program should have a unique identity among peer public institutions"

The second meeting, held on 4 February 1982, again involved ANU academics Elliott and Howlett with for the first time Don Aitkin (Political Science) and Frank Fenner (Microbiology and Virology). Giurgola was not present. A notable observation contained in those minutes was that "Artworks for the Parliament House should cover the diversity of the Australian environment, culture and lifestyle but should not try to compete with other institutions such as [the Australian National Gallery, Museum of Australia ... etc."[25] This was the germ of the idea that the Art Program should have a unique identity among peer public institutions.

"Strive for equal representation of the whole of civil society"

The third session, held on 18 February 1982, involved Sir Richard

Kingsland of the ACT Advisory Committee on the Arts; W. Worth, a consultant to the Australian Bicentennial Authority; W. Hamilton of the National Youth Advisory Group; and C. Wiltshire of the National Women's Advisory Group. The minutes recorded:

> The theme of the building should attempt to be inspiring and look towards the future. The historical aspect therefore should not be over-emphasised.
>
> Although the building opening was scheduled for the Bicentennial year, 1988, it should not over-emphasise the 1788 landing. It should reflect all successive waves of settlement over the millennia and in particular the contribution and achievements of <u>all</u> Australians in the last 200 years. The building should not however, attempt to be a museum or art gallery but should concentrate on those aspects not covered by other institutions.
>
> It is important that the building was not seen as a male domain but that women and children should also feel at home in the building. The interior should recognise the important contribution that youth and women have made in the development of Australia, and historical perspectives should reflect the importance of this role.[26]

The message was to strive for equal representation of the whole of civil society.

The fourth meeting took place on 26 February 1982. Contributions were received from the Chairman of the Australia Council Timothy Pascoe, writer Geoffrey Dutton, Yolngu artist and elder Wandjuk Marika, architect Philip Cox and Indigenous author Kath Walker (later Oodgeroo Noonuccal).

"Is an art collection needed at all?"

As the following excerpt from the notes of the meeting show, many ideas about the building's interior and prospective works of art were explored:

> The interior of the building should not reflect European ideas but rather should be representative of all groups who have made their home in Australia.
>
> It was important to provide initially a high standard of artworks. This would help maintain the standard in the future and would avoid them being removed later from the building.
>
> The [Sydney] Opera House, which was acknowledged to be a great building, did not rely on artworks. It was agreed that the design for the new Parliament also had the potential to be a great building and that it may be too early to determine whether the new building would require embellishment by the extensive use of artworks etc.
>
> No attempt should be made to combine artworks covering different subjects, types and periods, but rather a new positive theme should be developed which reflects in some way those previous art styles in a way which was sympathetic and appropriate to the new building.
>
> It was acknowledged that the new building would be required to house at least some of the portraits from the existing parliament and that the design should recognise this fact by providing an appropriate space for them.
>
> It may be appropriate to utilise some parts of the landscape of the building for artworks which are identified with the views and aspirations of Aboriginals.[27]

The views expressed, which were largely unattributed, are far apart. In the first place, Cox questioned whether an art collection was needed at all, arguing that art was a mere embellishment to a building that should otherwise speak for itself, as did the Sydney Opera House. An allied suspicion was that any works of art could be unexceptional and a waste of money, requiring rectification at some later time. A plea for parliamentary suitability was made too, calling for a sympathetic and appropriate theme to be developed. Although no guidance was given

on what this might be, the statement should probably be interpreted in the context of the recommendation immediately following it, which favoured retaining "the portraits from the existing parliament." Such a fixation on official portraiture seems to clash with the broader ideal that all groups who had made their home in Australia should be represented. Lastly, the suggestion that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art should be sited in the building's landscape could imply that such works did not deserve a place inside the building and were rather regarded as part of the campaign for land rights.

Giurgola's first ethos document was completed on 8 April 1982, in time for the inaugural full AAC meeting on 4 May 1982.[28] The paper begins with the self-justification that he was entitled to philosophise on an Australian national spirit, despite being a foreigner; Giurgola wrote that he had worked closely with Australians, read Australian history and literature extensively and met many artists and craftspeople. Although he expressly acknowledged the great profit he had gained from the earlier discussions arranged by Sir John Overall, such views were not directly adopted in framing the paper. He distilled what he saw as twin aspects of Australian life: a "strong sense of rugged individualism within an equally strong spirit of belonging." To Giurgola, these attributes were represented through works of art that spoke to what he saw as "a richness of contrast between aboriginal [sic], European and Asian legacies."[29] Giurgola accentuated the power of artistic expression: "For it is through history, literature and art that one may cut through the armour of habits and conventions to reach toward a view of the more intimate and basic aspects of people's lives."[30] Nevertheless, the resistance and durability of an "armour of habits and conventions" would result in Giurgola's vision for the art acquisition program becoming compromised. Giurgola concluded his analysis with an overarching warning that "it would obviously be inappropriate to adopt a single, particular character for the Parliament in the sense of creating an artificial unifying theme," given that the Australian character was not static, rather in a state of flux because of the perceived "dualisms and dichotomies."[31] These ideas translated into a proposed Art Program that:

> ... on the public's itinerary, from the Public Foyer to the Galleries and the Chambers, art works may refer to aspects of Australian land and history as interpreted by artists of uncompromising quality. Works not only by contemporary artists but also by earlier Australians like Arthur Streeton and Lloyd Rees should be represented, forming the nucleus of a small collection which will constitute a model of excellence ... In areas that primarily belong to the Members, such as the Members' Hall, the Lobbies, and the Reception Hall, portraits may well serve as the focus of legislative history, but the evocative power of contemporary works could substantially enrich the larger spaces and the ceremonial areas ... Art work will also be found in the office areas. Here, however, the individual choices of Members should prevail, choices which will reflect personal tastes or a connection with the constituency. It is hoped that the selective attitudes for the public areas will influence these individual choices in terms of quality.[32]

This formulation was fourfold: a public area devoted to "land and (post-European settlement) history; the traditional parliamentary portraits; contemporary art in the non-restricted circulation spaces; and parliamentary offices self-decorated according to personal taste.

The recipe survived the ensuing scrutiny by the Advisory Committee, Construction Authority and Standing Committee largely intact. No mention had yet been made of the contributions of Aboriginal or immigrant artists.

The philosophical debate about the ethos or nature of the Art Program initially appeared to centre on Giurgola and Sir Joseph Burke. Sir Joseph's response to Giurgola's ethos paper argued for a widening of "the range of categories from which the art of the past could be made," characterising the national sense of self as "shared heroic experience ... each is a heroic or epic category which has played a part in forging the Australian ethos and embodies national values which are important for the future."[33] The artistic manifestations of the Australian ethos as Sir Joseph saw them were:

> **Storm, shipwreck, marine adventure** – A shared danger

providing a powerful bond between settlers, represented by the works of William Hodges, Oswald Brierley, Augustus Earle
Exploration – Epic stories of imaginative experiences (no specific artists recommended)
Migrants and refugees – Providing the nation's self-awareness and idealism, represented by Tom Roberts, William Dobell, Yosl Bergner, Vic O'Connor, Noel Counihan
Drought, fire, natural disasters – Russell Drysdale
Pioneering times (especially gold rushes) – S.T. Gill
Modern industry – Noel Counihan, Rick Amor, and
Australian landscape (Giurgola's favourite category) – Heroic aspects, particularly the oeuvre of William Delafield Cook.

In mid-1982, Giurgola saw virtue in contemporary as well as earlier works. Sir Joseph, on the other hand, preferred painters capable of addressing what he saw as the big topics in Australian life, believing only well-established, generally dead, male artists were capable of being the authors of such stories. Sir Joseph, as with Giurgola, omitted any reference to Indigenous artists or artists who had arrived from other countries.

"A sense of impossibility hovered over the nascent acquisition policy"

The Advisory Committee submitted a report to the Construction Authority in September 1982, presenting the Committee's vision for the Art Program. Key objectives included:

> The building should reflect the time in which it is built and should have an emphasis towards the future, but this could be balanced to some extent by the use of artworks or materials evocative of earlier periods … The interior design should give a sense of belonging to all Australians and should reflect, to some extent, the diverse customs and cultures of the various ethnic groups within a single unifying theme. The interior of the building should endeavour to capture the notion of classic timelessness rather than be restricted to the symbolism of any one period in time.[34]

Giurgola's initial ideas about diverse customs and belonging, found in the ethos document, persisted in principle to that time. However, it is difficult to see how a single unifying theme could be found, given the dualisms and dichotomies he identifies: "… the finished and unfinished, the refined and the raw … great stillness and motion, loyalty and self-reliance, imposed order and its absence."[35] A sense of impossibility hovered over the nascent acquisition policy. The Advisory Committee report went on to say that purchased art "will cover the works of contemporary artists whose earlier work may be more appropriate for the building."[36] It seems that including mostly current work by contemporary artists was too radical an idea for the committee at that stage.

My impression is that the concept of classical timelessness was a direct challenge to the dark wood panelling and early-20th-century furniture of Provisional Parliament House. That is, Giurgola evidently did not want the new Parliament to be a scaled-up version of the old.[37] In Giurgola's vision, the new building needed to be a public space of enormous symbolic and cultural value, and art would be an essential part of the sensory and aesthetic experience the building provided.

"Ideas about the place of contemporary art in Parliament had prevailed over nostalgia"

Sir Joseph characterised the work of the Advisory Committee until September 1983 as limited to "preparing lists of artists and artworks at the request of the architect."[38] That changed with the issuing of Giurgola's Interim Report in that month on the conceptual basis of the Art Program, intended for the Standing Committee's endorsement. The Interim Report pithily conveyed Giurgola's intention for Parliament's art and decoration to be representative of "[the] inspiration and aspiration of our democracy, the diversity of our vast land and of a spirit of community engendered by immigration, throughout the period of colonisation and settlement."[39] This formula of "inspiration and aspiration" was approved by Sir Joseph as the best formulation of a unifying theme. The Standing Committee endorsed the Interim Report with some qualification at its meeting on 8 October 1984, additionally

agreeing to extend the Art Program to decorating parliamentarians' suites.[40] The qualification was that "greater emphasis be given to the Parliamentary nature of the building" without defining or elaborating on what that meant. This was probably the first glimpse of a long-standing institutional fear by certain politicians of the ambit of "the best in all aspects of Australian visual arts," preferring a narrower scope along the lines of official portraits and realistic landscape paintings.[41] This language was later echoed with approval as "the best of all aspects of contemporary Australian visual arts [playing] an important role in responding to the spirit and character of the Parliament."[42] Clarification of the acquisition policy took more than two years. Nonetheless, the first fully formed policy for the intended purchased works collection had been stated: the public areas were to tell a story of land and post-European settlement history through paintings of the greatest quality from any period. Contemporary works would be hung in the private general circulation areas, and a stockroom would be established from which parliamentarians could select for their suites according to their preferences. In the battle to shape the Art Program, Giurgola's ideas about the place of contemporary art in Parliament had prevailed over Sir Joseph's nostalgia; however, Sir Joseph had proposed limits on parliamentarians' choices when selecting works for their suites, saying Burke went on to disapprove ("I am not happy") of parliamentarians decorating their suites but conceded "this is inevitable". Rather, he proposed a collection of prints be established and made available and in so doing "stamp a dignified character on rooms otherwise messed up", adding the value laden rejoinder that "the idea of getting something for nothing is likely to appeal to those with the worst taste".[43]

Rumley and Berg wrote a discussion paper in July 1984 about the "very particular approach"—grounded in a particular vision of "'Appropriateness'"—needed when choosing works for the parliamentarians' suites.[44] This subset of the Collection did not sit easily with established policy to support living artists and works of contemporaneity because it was understood that most parliamentarians had conservative tastes, preferring "historical or traditional works".[45] Not only was style an issue, cost too was a potential barrier. A single painting by Arthur Streeton, for example, would have consumed the remaining budget. Rumley and Berg met this challenge by suggesting (far cheaper) prints or other works on paper of such subjects such that: "Parliamentarians and their staff will be able to choose from the Collection those works [...] with which they can personally identify and which express their own characteristics, beliefs and individualities".[46] Rumley and Berg also pointed out that parliamentarians' preferences were not the only determination governing their selection process—the needs of other users also needed to be considered. The difficulty with this is how to resolve personal taste with the ambition of projecting a forward-looking country confident in its modernity as expressed through its contemporary artists. Ultimately, however, Rumley and Berg could not resolve this dilemma, instead they restated the problem as: "the works should also be capable of being appreciated by distinguished overseas people while being stimulating without being overwhelmingly provocative to members of the general public [or parliamentarians] who have little knowledge of art".[47]

Rumley and Berg have identified the uniqueness of the intended Art Program given the nature, purpose and functioning of the building in which it would exist. They typified the artworks constituting the Collection as needing to exhibit "appropriateness", while being "a free enhancement of daily life in the building". As such, they distinguished the Collection from public art museums and corporate collections in this way:

> As such, it is clear that the aim for acquiring works for this Collection does not parallel the acquisition policies of public art museums which generally place primary consideration on the overall balance of collection areas, wide representation and the relationship of each work to others. Also dissimilar from the intent of the new Parliament House Collection is the approach taken by other public art projects, particularly business corporations. Such collections are often slick in character and art is acquired with the 'corporate image' in mind, rather than on the basis of significance and functional suitability. In comparison with corporation offices and foyers, the Parliamentarians' Suites have more of a domestic character to them and therefore changes the emphasis on the use of works of art.[48]

The idea that a parliamentarian's place of work should have a more "domestic character" is code for and reinforces the idea that the choice of art is a personal one.

Giurgola's later observations on the scope and outcome of the Art Program included:

> This decision [to use Australian art, craft and craftsmanship in the making of the building] resulted in an active program for the arts specifically involving the work of many young and mid-career Australian artists and craftspeople, rather than what would have occurred if art in the building had been restricted to the dark historical portraits and paintings of the past. The meaning of this active contemporary art program goes far beyond the presence of art as pleasurable visual engagement in the spaces of the building. Instead, the role given to the presence of Australian art and craft in the building has in fact become a kind of active historical testimonial about Australian culture which is of great value, juxtaposed within the life and dynamics of the Parliament as the "national place."[49]

In these few sentences, Giurgola gave a powerful justification for pursuing contemporary art. His original advocacy of the evocative power of such work is in retrospect open to larger claims. Even though many so-called dark historical portraits would be included (in the Historic Memorials Collection), so would be many other works by the new generation of artists, thereby supporting the arts generally and early career artists' livelihoods particularly. Giurgola acknowledged the importance of the work done by the Parliament and ministers, as well as the strong symbolism of the building. Within this framework, contemporary art not only provided a pleasant workplace environment, but held a mirror up to the life and issues of the nation as transacted in Parliament's policy and legislative work.

The acquisitions policy was thus agreed, and purchasing could begin as soon as a curator was chosen. Katrina Rumley was appointed Art Program Curator in mid-1983. Rumley's previous roles included Senior Project Officer with the Visual Arts Board from 1975 to 1983, where she was responsible for a wide range of projects in support of Australian art and artists including a major program to expand the number of regional galleries. Rumley was Australian Commissioner for the Venice Biennale in 1982 and was founding director of the newly re-housed Geelong Art Gallery from 1972 to 1975.

"Who was to choose?"

The vexed question then became who was to choose works for the building? The original plan of the Construction Authority, Advisory Committee and architects was that the Advisory Committee would provide advice to the Construction Authority on the selection and acquisition of works. The division of responsibility between the Construction Authority and the architects as client and contractor implied that Construction Authority would have the final say, but this was not clearly established at that time. In 1983, Fowler saw the Construction Authority as working with the architect on the "identification of artworks to be purchased, commissioned or borrowed [and] the selection of artists."[50] The amended contractual arrangement required that the Advisory Committee submit recommendations to the Construction Authority, which in turn needed approval from Standing Committee. To complicate the web of responsibilities, the curator's duties included preparation of "reports and proposals [made to the Advisory Committee] for the purchase of existing works of art and craft."[51] Rumley was in the invidious position of not knowing which organisation to serve: she was an employee of Construction Authority and an advisor to the Advisory Committee which advised the Construction Authority. At the same time, the Giurgola was a member of the Advisory Committee, an adviser to the Construction Authority and held a power of veto. The circularity of relationships is acknowledged in the accompanying meeting minutes, where Fowler noted "[c]ontract negotiations are currently under way with the architect concerning the interior design and a more comprehensive statement would be made following these negotiations which would outline the responsibility of all groups."[52] The tangled arrangements would be a continuing source of tension.

Interestingly, Giurgola had already acted independently of the Advisory Committee. In a memorandum of 6 April 1983, Berg informed the Advisory Committee that she and Giurgola had visited the artist Lloyd Rees at his studio in Hobart in December 1982 and inspected unsold new works by that artist following an exhibition at Macquarie Galleries in Sydney in September of that year. Berg and Giurgola recommended to the Advisory Committee that one or more of the paintings be acquired, despite "the somewhat premature condition of development of the art work program for the building at present," and in full knowledge that these works were expensive: $30,000 each.[53] In the event, two were purchased with the agreement of the Standing Committee: *Dusk on the Derwent* (1982) and *Passing vision* (1982–83). The issue of acquisition approvals was an ongoing point of contention between Giurgola, the Construction Authority and the Advisory Committee. Giurgola wrote to Fowler on 17 April 1984 in somewhat churlish terms:

> If, on the other hand, the Authority wishes to purchase works of art which the Architect cannot endorse, I suppose the Authority could place those works in storage until after the opening of the building in 1988, and then install them after departure of the Architect from the completed project when he no longer has any obligation for the building.[54]

Berg wrote to Rumley with similar bluntness:

> As indicated in its very name, the AAC's duty is to advise the Authority, and by association, the Architect; it would appear that it was intentionally not entitled the "Art Selection Committee" because that is not its duty.[55]

The impasse appears to have been resolved at an Advisory Committee meeting on 16 November 1984 through establishment of acquisitions sub-committees with delegated authority to reserve items on the Advisory Committee's behalf without Giurgola or his representative being present, but with Giurgola retaining the right to subsequently endorse or reject all recommendations. Coincidentally, that same meeting dealt with whether the Advisory Committee and the architects each agreed to propose to the Construction Authority the acquisition of John Wolseley's monumental *From Bendigo to Kyoto in search of Basho*, 1983–84, for $14,000. The work had been reserved with the gallerist Rex Irwin in Sydney for some time, up to three or four months according to Rumley.[56]

From the two works acquired in 1983 the number grew to 113 in 1984. The complicated approvals process meant the acquisition rate was slow, given the planned target of 3000, causing Rumley and some Advisory Committee members to worry that the building's walls and spaces would only be sparsely filled at the official opening, at that time set for May 1988. Baily submitted to the Advisory Committee meeting on 7 March 1985 that acquiring the targeted 3000 items in the remaining three years would mean buying an average of 30 works a week.

Two records have been located of Advisory Committee meetings where a veto was expressly exercised by Giurgola, recorded in a matter-of-fact way: "The Architects did not endorse the following works on reserve."[57] In the second case, the meeting minutes recorded a sense of frustration with Giurgola's wide powers: "The large Gunter Christmann painting was recommended by all Committee Members but was not endorsed by the Architect."[58]

"Brack at his best"

The Christmann work, *Squint*, 1980, was later acquired, inferring that Giurgola had lifted his veto. On another occasion, Rumley proposed John Brack's *No*, 1984 (Figure 2), offered by Melbourne dealer Georges Mora for $30,000; she wrote a long supporting document, concluding: "Having viewed the work, I feel that it probably even surpasses those in the original [pencil] series and is Brack at his best."[59]

Berg wrote an equally long reply to the proposal a week later, on behalf of the architects. They were concerned about the painting's cost and were troubled about where to place such a large work (c. 180 x 150 cm). Nevertheless, Berg almost immediately travelled to Melbourne to view the painting and "was impressed with its superb surface and subtle presence." The architects still would not agree to an informal



Figure 2. John Brack, No, *1984, oil on canvas, 182 x 152 cm. Acquired 1984. Rotational Collection. Source: Expressing Australia.*

agreement from Advisory Committee members; they insisted that the question be resolved at a formal meeting.[60] In the event, *No* was bought and represents one of the most notable paintings in the collection.

Rumley and Berg jointly wrote a discussion paper in July 1984 about what they called a "very particular approach," which was grounded in a vision of appropriateness that was needed when choosing works for parliamentarians' suites.[61] This subset of the collection did not sit easily with established policy to support living artists and recent works because it was understood that most parliamentarians had conservative tastes, preferring "historical or traditional works."[62] Cost was a potential barrier, in addition to the criterion of appropriateness. A single painting by Arthur Streeton, for example, would have consumed the remaining acquisition budget. Rumley and Berg met this challenge by suggesting prints or other works on paper at much lower cost:

> Parliamentarians and their staff will be able to choose from the collection those works … with which they can personally identify and which express their own characteristics, beliefs and individualities.[63]

Rumley and Berg also pointed out that parliamentarians' preferences were not the only determination governing their selection process; the needs of other users had to be considered. The challenge was how to resolve parliamentarians' personal tastes and still project a forward-looking country, confident in its modernity as expressed by its contemporary artists. Ultimately, however, Rumley and Berg could not resolve this dilemma; instead, they restated the problem this way:

> [T]he works should also be capable of being appreciated by distinguished overseas people while being stimulating without being overwhelmingly provocative to members of the general public [or parliamentarians] who have little knowledge of art.[64]

Rumley and Berg identified the uniqueness of the intended Art Program, given the nature of the building. They characterised the works in the collection as needing to exhibit appropriateness while adding what they called "a free enhancement of daily life in the building." Appropriateness thus contended with the goals of inspiring occupants and visitors as well as satisfying parliamentarians' preferences. The solution might have been to collect every possible style and medium; that idea was soon tested.

A degree of uncertainty still existed around the acquisition policy, and the parliamentary suites sub-collection particularly. An unattributed report from early 1985 says:

> The attitude towards such proposed acquisitions has been to concentrate on groups of works by major contemporary Australian artists whose oeuvre covers a 20–30-year period. Studio visits have been made to such artists as Imants Tillers, Roger Kemp, Noel Counihan, Peter Booth, Gunter Christmann and Colin Lanceley, enabling the selection of suites of the best works available and suitable for the building.[65]

This suggests that contemporary works by established rather than emerging artists were preferred.

"More pictures of gum trees and homesteads are needed"

Iain Fowler wrote a memo to Rumley on 29 August 1985 about an incidental conversation he had had with Construction Authority Chairman Sir Bernard Callinan and Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Environment Barry Cohen.[66] Fowler's memorandum reported a colonial-era nostalgia stating:

> The recurring theme [of the conversation] was that there needed to be more [pictures of] "gum trees" and "homesteads" included in the collection.

Furthermore, Sir Bernard and Cohen said they thought paintings by contemporary artists in what they viewed as the appropriate landscape style could still be "acquired at a modest price."[67] Rumley replied to Fowler on 5 September expressing some concern, and emphasised that significant landscape paintings had been and would continue

to be acquired, but cautioned that only "amateur and bad landscape paintings [could be obtained] for small prices." Rumley underlined that the foreshadowed budget cuts would inevitably mean that the landscape genre would be restricted; she noted that such a work by Arthur Boyd, *Very early morning sunrise, Pulpit Rock*, 1984–85, had recently been bought for $30,000 and another by John Passmore, *Figures on beach*, c. 1950, for $25,000.

Only 700 of the 3000 works estimated to be needed to fulfil the Art Program had been acquired by April 1985;[68] a further 230 works, including craft objects, were bought or reserved in July, August and September of that year.[69] Some of the works were bought directly from the artist and the remainder from dealers in Sydney and Melbourne. A further 400 works were acquired between September 1985 and mid-February 1986.[70] To achieve this, Rumley visited some 50 dealers and 20 artists' studios, diligently executing the agreed acquisition policy by using personal judgment without being confined by the many lists developed.

The Advisory Committee held its final meeting on 13 March 1987 then disbanded. Execution of the remainder of the Art Program fell to Construction Authority, notably Rumley and Registrar Bruce Dallas, and the architects.

"Snouts in the art trough"

Parliamentarians and staff began moving into the new building from early June 1988 and installation of art in the circulation areas and suites began in earnest. The earlier antipathy of parliamentarians to the suites' collection was swept aside in a clamour for the best works by established artists. Fowler was vigorously questioned about the selection process for the suites during a Senate Estimates Hearing on 20 October 1988. Fowler acknowledged that the only restraint on the number of works selected was Rumley's non-binding guidance; he confirmed that up to 26 works had been allocated to individual suites, leading the committee chair to say:

> If they had gone above the 26 then obviously there would have been some sort of moral opprobrium attached to that, but nobody actually stopped them pillaging like the Huns?[71]

Senator Peter Baume and his cousin Senator Michael Baume took up the cudgels in another forum:

> **Senator Peter Baume:** The Government withdrew some money from the budget provided for the furnishings of the new Parliament House. The Government made a judgment about the appropriate level of funding, and I do not question that decision. That was a decision for executive government. As a result of that funding withdrawal, the commissioning of art works had to be cut back and fewer art works were available for the Parliament.
>
> **Senator Michael Baume:** Yes, but who took them all?
>
> **Senator Peter Baume:** That is the very point I want to come to. The Executive, having decided that the art acquisition program should be cut back and that there should be fewer art works available, did not share in the consequences of that decision. It was awkward to obtain information because a couple of departments were involved. But during the examination of the Estimates I asked for the list of artworks that have been provided to Ministers and office holders. Of course, after they were provided with art works honourable senators were then allowed to choose two art works for their own offices. Some might say that that is more than we are entitled to, more than we deserve or more than we can usefully appreciate. But let us put that question to one side.
>
> **Senator Michael Baume:** How many did the big fellows get?
>
> **Senator Peter Baume:** That is most interesting. The list that I received showed that some of the Ministers or office-holders received 25 art works or more. Some of them have very large suites to furnish. I understand that there are many walls for the artworks to go on. You, Mr President, actually received 25,

I think. The Prime Minister (Mr Hawke) received more. The Leader of my Party received almost the same number...[72]

Senator Michael Baume: The interesting matter is that there has been a lot of duckshoving about who is to blame for allowing the Executive to get their snouts in the art trough. I was interested to read a letter from the Clerk of the Senate outlining that the arrangements under which this was done were simply unsatisfactory. If the Joint House Department is in charge of identifying which works could be used for nominated parliamentarians' suites, may I ask the Joint House Department to go around and reallocate them. The Department has the power. Let us have them reallocated.[73]

No reallocation was made. Works were variously placed: those in public areas were carefully chosen; a youthful and diverse contemporary range hung in the general circulation areas; and individual preferences reigned in parliamentarians' suites.

Ultimately, the curatorial team was powerless to resist the demands of the group of senior parliamentarians who selected works without considering the consequences for their lower-ranking colleagues. Although Rumley had established a priority list, neither the Speaker nor the President wanted to impose sanctions or redress any excesses. In the event, many backbenchers' walls stayed bare.

During the establishment stage, only 24 works by Indigenous artists had been acquired by mid-1986, which included the 10 paintings submitted by the finalists for the Forecourt mosaic commission, which were automatically accessioned into the Rotational Collection. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Clyde Holding wrote to the new Construction Authority Chairman Alex Morokoff on 15 April 1986, saying: "I believe it is important for works of art by Aboriginal Australians to be given appropriate recognition and display within the New Parliament House."[74] Rumley, asked to reply, asserted the policy position of the Construction Authority to be "that the Art Program for the new Parliament House should properly represent the best available Aboriginal art from the various regions and urban centres." Her letter continues with an admission that few works had been acquired by this time, despite consultations with Indigenous art bodies such as the Aboriginal Arts Board and the Aboriginal Artists Agency, while asserting that a great deal of activity had been frustrated by the hold on purchasing implemented by the Standing Committee.[75]

A report by Rumley on Aboriginal art was recorded in the minutes of the Construction Authority's board meeting of 3 February 1987. In that report, Rumley explained that the lack of acquired works by Indigenous artists was not for want of trying, rather because of "big dispatches [of works] to the United States," the activities of other organisations in the market such as the Australian National Gallery, and demand for Aboriginal art arising from Bicentennial projects.[76] Nevertheless, Rumley persisted and in 1988 acquired bark paintings by Gunwinggu (Arnhem Land) artists Billy Bilinjarra Nabegeyo, Djawida, Robin Nganjmira, Thompson Nganjmira and Harry Mauraguda; acrylic paintings by Durndiwuy Wanambi (Dhuwal), George Milpurrurru (Ganalgingu) and Edwin Pareroultja (Arrernte); and linocuts by Jimmy Pike (Walmadjari).

In total, 42 paintings by Indigenous artists were acquired during the establishment stage, which comprised 2.4 per cent of total acquisitions. The art of Indigenous Australians was under-represented in the collection at this stage.

Custody of the Art Program was officially given by the Construction Authority to the Joint House Department on 23 December 1988, evidently as late as possible.[77] Rumley departed around April 1989 after acquiring a final three works of art in that year.

"Promises to be one of the most important collections of Australian contemporary art in the country"

Critics, parliamentarians and journalists had offered a range of opinions about the collected purchased works in the lead-up to the public opening of Parliament or soon after.

Some journalists had viewed the collection while it was still being

compiled. John Moses visited the Fyshwick storage facility in late 1986 and published an article about the visit in *The Australian*.[78] Moses enthused about the acquired works, which he said: "already promises to be one of the most important collections of Australian contemporary art in the country." Moses was particularly impressed by the twinned works of Brett Whiteley's *Arthur's Hill*, 1975 and Arthur Boyd's *Pulpit Rock*, 1984. Moses wrote:

> ... some luscious still-lifes by Donald Friend, Adrian Feint and the reclusive Godfrey Miller are there, with an early Leonard French; Roger Kemp, Francis Lymburner, John Olsen are there [too] ...

The Friend watercolour still-lifes were done in 1984 when the artist was 69; the Feints date from 1955–56 and the Millers from 1938–39. Moses noted the inclusion of Lorna Chick's naive landscapes, dating from 1985, when Chick was 63; the works had been recently painted. Moses goes on to laud the inclusion of Sidney Nolan's *Burke and Wills*, 1964 and Albert Tucker's *Gold fossicker*, 1955 as examples of Australia's conquest of the tyranny of distance and of individual enterprise. These were further examples of paintings not of the 1980s but of a previous generation's modernity. Moses said nothing about the work of the younger artists represented such as Dale Frank or David Larwill. Nevertheless, Rumley was unafraid to reach back to add older works to the collection.

"Kindergarten stuff, lots of squiggly lines with very high prices"

Rumley and Dallas arranged for other journalists to preview the works at the Fyshwick site in August 1987.[79] The Art Advisory Committee had by this time been disbanded. Journalist Sally Loane wrote a review in the *National Times on Sunday*, since defunct, which was published on 23 August 1987. Loane was drawn to the same Whiteley picture as Moses had been, as well as the Boyds, Friends and "visions from the enigmatic hand of the old Queensland cane cutter Sam Fullbrook" (six oil paintings from 1985). She covered earlier career artists summarily as "a large representation of work from lesser-known or younger artists." Loane, after speaking with former AAC and JSC member Steve Dubois, MP, made the assessment that "the politicians themselves prefer the intellectual safety of a landscape." Dubois is quoted as saying: "I don't think MPs are ready for too much avant-garde interpretational stuff." According to Loane, Dubois described the Standing Committee's decision-making this way:

> Some we rejected because they were not appropriate. They were kindergarten stuff, lots of squiggly lines with very high prices.

If Dubois was being serious in making this admission, the Standing Committee members must not have approved abstract art but deflected to asking what styles were appropriate for a legislature. Loane ended the article praising the buying policy:

> The experts wanted the best value for money and preferred to buy, for example, a series by a young, up-and-coming artist rather than a single piece by a famous name for the same price.

Prominent curator, writer and art critic Daniel Thomas wrote an appreciation of the purchased works shortly before the first parliamentary sittings began in the new building:

> [The acquisitions] are nearly all works made in the 1980s, for only works contemporary with the architecture will achieve the total harmony which is appropriate for art-as-interior-decoration in a palace of national symbolism.[80]

Thomas was of the same mind as Giurgola, who had argued that the "evocative power of contemporary works could substantially enrich the larger spaces and the ceremonial areas."[81]

Carl Andrew, a member of the Advisory Committee, offered this reflection in 1988:

> Constraints of location, of size, of character and mood, of subject matter, of durability and accessibility applied to almost every work commissioned or purchased for this building. Many of Australia's most highly regarded painters, sculptors, and craftspeople are not represented at all. Others are represented

> by works which might seem less significant in scale than their reputations would lead one to expect. But Parliament House was never intended to be a public gallery of Australian art. As almost all the art works have been produced in the mid-1980s, it is inevitable that as a collection they will be seen to represent a very specific period of Australian art history … It is possible that some will be replaced in due course, and it is certain that, given the cyclic nature of taste, many will fall into disfavour.[82]

Andrew neatly presaged challenges that would face the collection's managers into the 1990s and beyond, including the "time capsule" aspect; he made perhaps the earliest argument for a deaccessioning policy. But Andrew was unaware of what would occur in the development of the collection after 1988: continuous renewal would be achieved through the acquisition of new works produced in the following decades.

Liberal Senator Brian Archer from Tasmania had this to say shortly after the official opening:

> [The Senate] draws to the attention of those responsible for acquisition of artworks the reflection of the preferences of Senators and Members as a consistent cross-section of typical Australians and urges them to rearrange the purchase program to provide fewer abstracts and far more good landscapes reflecting Australian life and beauty.[83]

Archer's motion failed without debate for procedural reasons. However, this attitude persisted for years.

Writing in 1989 in the conservative journal *Quadrant*, academic John Carroll criticised the art collection. Carroll, although a sociologist not an art historian, reflected a persistent view:

> The building is littered with modern art – sculpture, painting and tapestry, in content either infantile or meaninglessly abstract. Even where the art is of value, what is it doing here? This is a Parliament not an Art Gallery. The paintings that do belong, the portraits of the parliamentary leaders of the past look awkward and out of place: their gilded frames and conventional style of portraiture are at odds with the contemporary interior design.[84]

The article makes it clear that Carroll's form of institutional precondition is flagged by expressions such as "tradition," "history" and "gravity of the nation." For Carroll there is only one proper course: "Parliament must return to its old and rightful home," Old Parliament House, a place where "the code of the gentleman should prevail" and there is no place for the works of art that are "in content either infantile or meaninglessly abstract."[85]

Janene Pellarin was seconded by the Joint House Department from the Commonwealth Department of the Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories in May 1989 as acting curator after Rumley's departure from the Construction Authority. Pellarin wrote an article in 1989 lauding the collaborative design process and lamenting the budget cuts to the Art Program, which in her view had denied the people working in Parliament a chance to appreciate "what a working office environment should be."[86] A year later Pellarin had harsh words to say in a published article about the prevailing atmosphere in the Parliament. Drawing on her brief experience as acting curator, Pellarin had quickly observed a chasm that had developed. The early grand vision and willing collaboration fostered by the Art Program had given way to the "pragmatism of an institution dominated by politicking, even on matters of daily housekeeping." The power of the presiding officers had closed off "the intended immediate and long-term maintenance, development and promotion of the collection." In other words, the acquisitions budget had been deleted.[87]

Another voice heard at the time was that of art historian Sylvia Kleinert. Writing in 1989, Kleinert was disturbed by the public's exclusion from viewing so much of the collection, and even then, "images of the landscape dominate the building." Kleinert would rather have seen:

> … the aggressive work of artists like Noel Counihan, Richard Dunn, Janenne Eaton and Toni Robertson that charge the viewer with an awareness of the formidable responsibilities of the legislative process.

Kleinert also addressed the lack of representation of Australia's multicultural society in the building's public spaces:

> Where is the allocation of public spaces which deal with the contentious issues of contemporary Australian society? What of our multicultural origins? What of the many Australians who carry with them alternative cultural traditions from Asia? The conclusion must be drawn that the art programme represents a monolithically Eurocentric reading of Australian culture.[88]

Parliamentarians, critics and reporters expressed a range of views. Equal numbers of supporters and detractors might suggest that the Advisory Committee and Katrina Rumley had achieved a correct balance, an even more impressive achievement given that funding for the planned Art Program was significantly cut by the Hawke Government.

Overall, apart from the small number of works by Indigenous artists, perhaps more works offering social criticism could have been acquired without transgressing the "not overwhelmingly provocative" rule.

In summary, the purchased works component of the Art Program chose the path of contemporary art, recognising the evocative power of that artistic ouvre as enriching Parliament: a new conception of appropriateness. Aldo Giurgola, a foreigner, achieved that outcome, overcoming the strongly held contrary views of Sir Joseph Burke, Leo McLeay and others in the process. The genius of the Advisory Committee, and Katrina Rumley in particular, was to modify the emphasis on contemporary work to cater for other tastes by acquiring a significant number of recent and older works by famous artists such as Clarice Beckett, Charles Blackman, Arthur Boyd, John Brack, Russell Drysdale, Hans Heysen, Albert Namatjira, John Olsen, Margaret Preston, Lloyd Rees, Jeffery Smart, Albert Tucker, Brett Whiteley and Fred Williams, while still focusing on the recent work of early-to-mid career artists and not succumbing to the gum-trees-and-homesteads style favoured by many parliamentarians.

The purchased works program was only partially fulfilled due to budget cuts across the board. Any reluctance expressed by some parliamentarians was short-lived, with an unrestrained scramble for the best works ensuing after the handover. But despite organisational and funding challenges, a new and significant collection of Australian contemporary art had come into being. Public access was at its high point, with a printed catalogue available and some 20 important works on display in the public foyer. However, difficult times lay ahead.

Chapter 2:

Neglected, saved, attacked, 1990–96

The Construction Authority's plan was to transfer possession of the Parliament building to the Australian Government, represented by the Joint House Department, in 1988 while continuing in existence until June 1991 to manage any defects and related contractual matters such as outstanding claims by contractors.[89] In the event, the Construction Authority was dissolved in September 1990. The reasons for the earlier termination were purely financial; the Minister for Administrative Services assumed the Construction Authority's responsibility for all outstanding issues. Administration of the art collection was inadequate after the handover. Janene Pellarin's secondment had evidently been planned for the period from May 1989 to April 1991.[90]

"No budget and no policies"

During her tenure, Pellarin lamented: "There is, however, no acquisitions budget" and "an acquisitions policy is needed." Added to this was the issue of public accessibility:

> Though a working building, it is also a national monument, unique and significant in world and national terms. Tours, other than of the public areas, are non-existent, as are tours which speak specifically to the building's art and architecture.[91]

More disturbingly, Pellarin noted that, across the political divide, parliamentarians "see themselves … in some way as owners of the building, to do with [it] as they please," citing two examples where the architects' decoration of dining rooms had been changed by the occupants in a manner that was "an insult to the work of the artists and craftspeople in the building." Pellarin named Speaker Leo McLeay as chief culprit, describing his "democratic anti-elitism" approach to the art and craft program as "dangerous and destructive."[92]

The Joint House Department, possibly in response to Pellarin's public criticisms, commissioned prominent gallery director Julian Faigan to investigate the Department's Art Services group in May 1990.[93] Faigan's terms of reference covered the staffing and management options for the art collections as well as an examination of "future acquisitions and commissions, exhibitions, publications, links with education and marketing."[94] In Faigan's blunt assessment "there appeared to be no policies regarding the collection."[95]

He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to prepare a report on such issues, because "[t]his Report is, after all, devoted to the safe management of one of the most exciting creative experiments in Australia's cultural history."[96]

Faigan interviewed eight Senators and nine MPs; his research was cut short by the impatience of Speaker McLeay. Notable in Faigan's report were the comments of two unnamed parliamentarians on the collection's purpose. The first expressed "a general nervousness that the collection is becoming static – a time capsule of the 1980s."[97] The second interviewee said that "the collection should continue to embrace art by young, adventurous artists if only to counter the rather conservative nature of many people's inclination in this area."[98]

Faigan explored the options of a director and curator being employed, contracted or outsourced to manage exhibitions, acquisitions, education programs, marketing, publications, cataloguing and conservation for the collection. Faigan's stated preference was to engage the Commonwealth art-lending organisation Artbank to fulfil this need.[99] In early 1991, the Secretary of the Joint House Department obtained a costing of $1.5 million from Artbank to provide the specified services for three years, compared with a total three-year cost of $763,000 to continue with the current in-house arrangement. Senate President Kerry Sibraa and Speaker Leo McLeay chose the less costly option.[100] Six new staff were approved, to be hired on three-year contracts for the positions of director, curator, registrar and three technical officers. The

first director was Michael Jones, with Peter Haynes as curator. Haynes was curator from 1991 to 1995. He had limited funds for acquisitions.

"The great exhibitor"

Haynes showed the collection through public exhibitions, all held in the presiding officers' exhibition area on the first floor of Parliament, which is publicly accessible. The exhibitions, brief and in quick succession, are listed below.

6 March to 7 April 1992: Artists from Canberra and Districts in the Parliament House Art Collection

The 12 represented artists included Janet Dawson, Rosalie Gascoigne and Michael Taylor.[101] All of the artists had a connection with Canberra and surrounding districts. The exhibition contained paintings and works on paper in a variety of styles including abstract forms (as in Richard Larter's work). Most of the works chosen had been created in the 1980s. Haynes had not included any of the older works so favoured by parliamentarians. As Haynes put it, the exhibition "provides a tantalising example of the range and diversity of the collection," and yet was unashamedly directed to a local audience: "simultaneously giving insight into the rich creativity of the ACT."[102] In a way this was an odd theme for an inaugural exhibition, given that it tended to exclude visitors from outside the Canberra region, but is probably explained by the exhibition's being timed to coincide with the Canberra Festival. Later known as the Canberra and Region Heritage Festival, this event has been run by the ACT Government for 40 years.

Second half of 1992: Landscape Art from the Parliament House Art Collection

Haynes had chosen the landscape genre "because our national identity is strongly tied to our relationship with, and definition of, the landscape." But surprisingly, none of the big-name landscape artists' works held in the collection were exhibited by Haynes; rather, he chose pictures by a diverse group of 15 artists including Lorna Chick, Peggy Poulson Naparulla (Walpiri)and Imants Tillers.[103] The works ranged in time from Clarice Beckett's two paintings *Melbourne skyline* and *Three boats* from the 1920s or 30s to Philip Gudthaykudthay's abstract landscape of 1989.[104]

Haynes, in compiling a genre-based show, had cast a wide net, including works depicting city scenes, flower gardens and mine sites as well as sandstone headlands, lagoons and farmland. Haynes eschewed the desire for more pictures of gum trees and homesteads, preferring a range of approaches, which suggests he wanted to introduce the public audience to a wider expression of the genre rather than the politicians' deep-seated colonial-era nostalgia. Haynes's broad approach was further underlined by his inclusion of two works by Indigenous artists Peggy Napurrula Poulson and Philip Gudthaykudhay, which at first sight might have appeared uncharacteristic of figurative rural landscape paintings.

6 September to 17 October 1993: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art: Parliament House art collection

This exhibition presented the corpus of collected works by Indigenous artists, which had expanded by about 50 per cent to some 65. Most of the artists originated from places in Arnhem Land, and gaps in geographical representation remained. Hermannsburg, the Great Sandy Desert, Aurukun and the Torres Strait Islands were each represented by a single artist. On the other hand, the proportion of Indigenous women artists had increased, with works added in 1992 by Noreen Nambidjina Robertson (Warlpiri), Audrey Napananga Martin (Kartangarurru), Peggy Napurrurla Poulson (Warlpiri; included in consecutive exhibitions), Rene Napangardi Robinson (Kukatji) and Brunwyn Yunupingu (Gamatji). The exhibition represented an inflexion point in appreciation of Australian Indigenous art. Haynes expressed this goal:

> This exhibition is a celebration of the diversity and vitality of contemporary visual arts practice by the descendants of Australia's original owners and of 1993 being the International Year for the World's Indigenous People. The Parliament House Art collection has a very fine selection of works by some of

> Australia's leading Indigenous artists and this is the first occasion on which most of these works will be made available for public viewing.[105]

Acquiring further Indigenous art had become a priority for Haynes despite limited funding. He stretched the facilities too: the exhibition would have occupied the entire available exhibition space. Haynes was prioritising Aboriginal art in developing the collection and showing it as widely as possible. That priority reflected a heightened recognition of Indigenous art by established bodies: for example, Australia had officially exhibited work by Indigenous artists Rover Thomas and Trevor Nickolls at the 1990 Venice Biennale Art Exhibition.

11 March to 17 April 1994: Images of work and leisure (in conjunction with the Canberra Festival)

Haynes explained the choice: "Both the themes of the exhibition form integral parts of the lives of all Australians, and it is to be expected that Australian artists would look to these themes as fertile sources for a wide range of images." Haynes's description of the subject matter exemplifying the underlying theme was:

> The earliest work in the exhibition dates from 1914, while the latest dates from 1987. Included in the range of works selected are images of cricket, football, horse racing, golf, the beach and more "cultured" pursuits such as reading and dancing. Images of working life include the daily grind of commuting come on the physical labour of mining and domestic chores such as washing and ironing.[106]

This is an interesting approach from a curatorial perspective that allowed an otherwise unconnected group of pictures, all of which were had been acquired during Rumley's tenure as curator, most created in the 1980s. They were grouped thematically and exhibited together. Haynes conceded as much, saying "[the exhibition] points to the variety of stylistic, aesthetic and philosophical approaches at play in the Australian art world." Haynes made the most of the works available to him in furtherance of his project of exposing the collection publicly. The adoption of a thematic exhibition tends to unify and add a coherence to the collection.[107]

31 August to 16 October 1994: Abstract Art (in conjunction with Floriade)

The connection between a horticultural show, Floriade, and abstract art is elusive. Haynes argued that the choice of genre was appropriate because the "symbolic nature of much of the building" was abstract in nature and the exhibition directly correlated the artistic idiom of the 1970s and 1980s with the design and construction of the Parliament. A better explanation might be that Haynes was determined to expose the abstract art in the collection to the public to foster appreciation of a more difficult aesthetic style. There had already been complaints by parliamentarians such as Senator Archer about the inclusion of abstract works of art in the collection; more would follow, and Haynes must have foreseen the potential controversy. He went further than earlier curators to explain the works, writing a detailed essay introducing the exhibition and the included artists. He promoted the value of abstract art as incorporating "varying formal and expressive visual languages," and argued for its significance in "questioning of the long-held belief in the representational model of art as being of paramount importance." In an endnote, Haynes offered a compact justification of the merit of abstract art, drawing an analogy with landscapes:

> The influence of the landscape on artists in Australia is pervasive, and has been since European settlement (and earlier). That this influence is present in abstract art as manifested in Australia is a pertinent issue in the present exhibition.[108]

Thirty-two works were exhibited, all of which had been acquired in 1985 or 1986 by Rumley.[109]

The collection held further abstract works by Janet Dawson (*Wall six*, 1969), Sydney Ball (Untitled, 1978), Gareth Sansom (*Safe house*, 1985), Michael Taylor (*Blue painting*, 1975) and Peter Booth (Untitled, 1985) among others that are reproduced in *Expressing Australia*. The works not exhibited appear neither more nor less abstract than those

that were shown, which suggests the curatorial choices were based on the capacity of the exhibition area and the availability of works (some might have been hanging in parliamentarians' suites at the time).

10 March to 30 April 1995: Sculpture: Parliament House art collection

Curatorial credit is given to Haynes even though he had departed before the opening. The exhibition was held in conjunction with the first National Capital Sculpture Forum and the Canberra Festival. Haynes curated some 35 objects for the exhibition and interestingly included two works by Rosalie Gascoigne, whose oeuvre sits uncomfortably within the classification of sculpture as her work is usually considered to be assemblage. Haynes had previously placed Gascoigne into the landscape section in the exhibition catalogue for the earlier Artists from Canberra and Districts exhibition: "Gascoigne's concern with the landscape is apparent in all her work and its evocation is very subtle."[110]

Haynes, faced with a static pool of works, had imaginatively carved-out four categorised exhibitions (landscapes, abstract works, sculpture and Indigenous art) and two themed shows (work and leisure; and Canberra and district artists). The recent acquisitions format was unavailable because few had been purchased during Pellarin and Haynes's tenures; those that had been, principally works by Indigenous artists, had been included in the Indigenous exhibition. An omission by Haynes and Pellarin was portraiture, although that style had not been sought by Rumley and there were many official portraits already on display.

Haynes seems to have been playing to a local audience. The exhibitions coincided with Canberra festivals and ran for only four to six weeks. The limited exhibition space constrained the number of works that could be shown to about 30, making the exhibitions probably too small to attract many out-of-town visitors.

Nevertheless, Haynes had succeeded in turning the face of the collection towards the public, while having to meet competing demands for works from within Parliament. He had a limited stockroom and no new acquisition budget. Haynes departed in January 1995.

Pellarin acquired three works on paper to the collection in 1989, including Jesse Hilder's *Three barrows in the clay pit*, 1914. She purchased two linocuts in 1990. Haynes did not add any works in 1991. Of the 20 works he acquired in 1992, 18 were by Indigenous artists. They included: works by the Yolngu of North-East Arnhem Land (natural ochres on bark); five acrylic-on-canvas paintings by Warlpiri women from central Australia; and four works by a Meriam Mer artist from the Torres Strait. Indigenous art was thus being more widely represented. In a similar way, five works by Tasmanian artist Richard Stringer (silver-gelatine prints) were acquired in 1993, perhaps because Tasmanian artists other than Lloyd Rees had been under-represented. No acquisitions were made in 1994.

"We have an art collection in Parliament. … It's one of the best contemporary art collections in Australia"

Haynes's replacement as curator was a consultant, Deborah Hart, who later became Senior Curator of Australian Art at National Gallery of Australia. Hart's role as consultant curator in sustaining and expanding the Rotational Collection after the intervening lean years following Parliament's opening in 1988 needed money as well as enthusiastic support from the presiding officers. The enthusiasm came from Michael Beahan, who became President of the Senate in February 1994, following Paul Keating's election as prime minister in 1993. Beahan explained his involvement at the time thus:

> I had a deal with the Speaker [Stephen Martin] that he would do all sports matters and I would do all arts matters. I got the better deal because we have an art collection in Parliament. … It's one of the best contemporary art collections in Australia. And it's designed to be a lively art collection representing Australia as it is, and not to be a static display. And that's supposed to be displayed in public places but also in the offices of Members and Senators and staff, and it's a great privilege for those people … It was being badly managed, or not managed at all really, so I took on that as a responsibility and set up a committee,

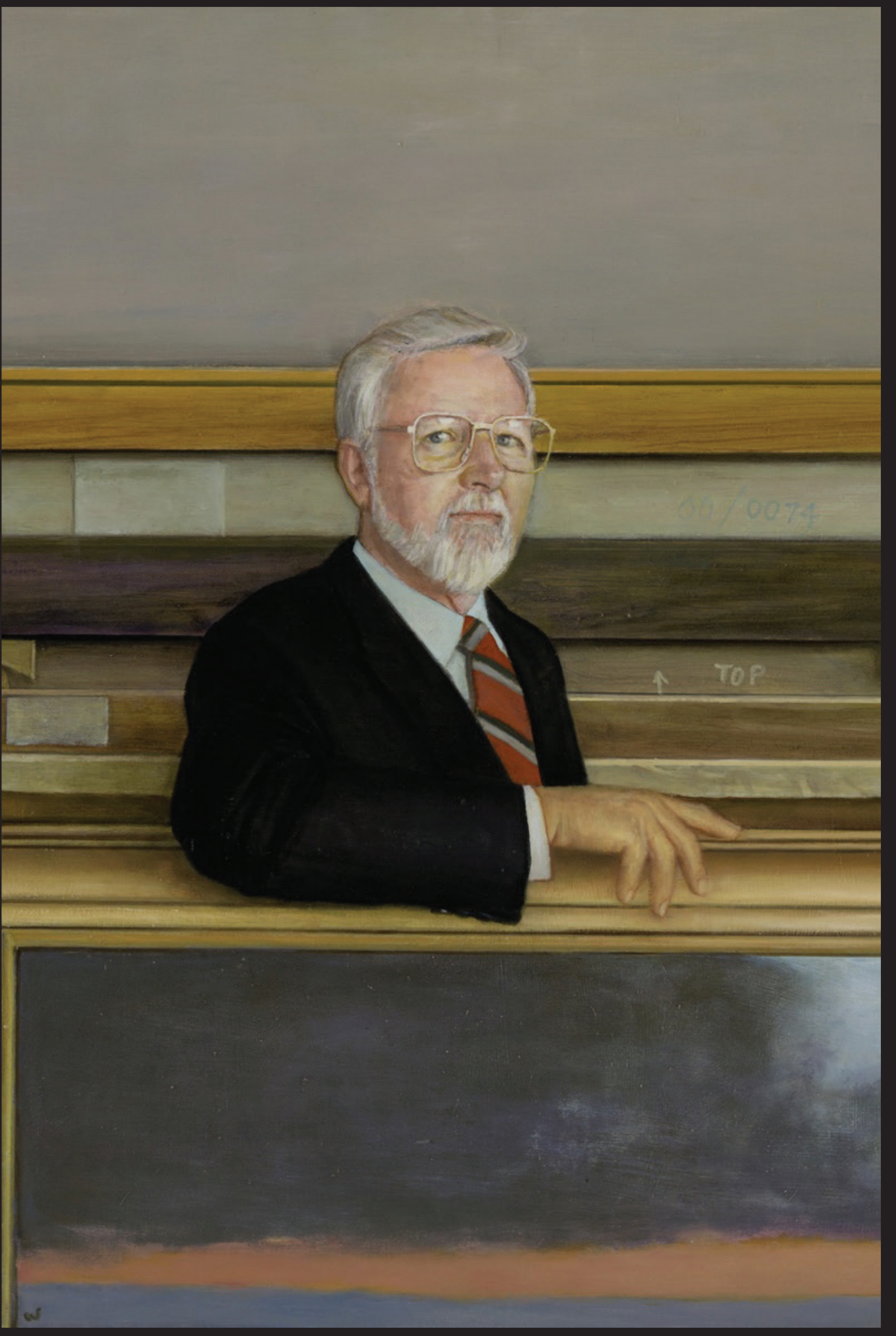


Figure 3. Bryan Wyndham Westwood, Michael Eamon Beahan*, 1998, oil on canvas, 105.7 x 105.5 cm, Parliament House Art Collection. Source: HMC.*

> and managed to corner some money from the proceeds of the gift shop which were substantial and got approval for that not to go back into consolidated revenue but to go into acquisition programs because it was an unbalanced collection. There were some States not properly represented, some art forms not properly represented, women weren't represented sufficiently, urban Aboriginal art wasn't represented properly, and so on … So, we set out to get that balance right and set up a small committee and got a curator to do the buying and had the whole collection properly managed and circulated [for conservation purposes] … I enjoyed that [role] very much and hence my portrait in Parliament is one with my arm on a series of paintings.[111]

The portrait (Figure 3) is part of the HMC.

Beahan maintained that the idea of requisitioning $100,000 from the Parliament shop's operating (sales) surplus was his, yet according to one source, much earlier in April 1989, Katrina Rumley wrote to Joint House Department Secretary Mike Bolton proposing "that the source of funds be drawn from the Private Dining Rooms' income or profits from Parliament's gift shop."[112] Nevertheless, whether Beahan's or Rumley's idea, a source of funding had been identified.

Beahan reintroduced an art advisory committee comprising himself and:

> Speaker Stephen Martin
> JHD Art Services Director Michael Jones
> consultant curator Deborah Hart
> JHD Secretary Michael Bolton
> external experts – Aldo Giurgola, Pam Berg, art historian Mary Eagle and artists Maria Kozic and Ken Unsworth
> MPs Garry Nehl and Olive Zakharov, and
> JHD officers Derek Abbot and Phil Bergin. [113]

There is evidence of a formal acquisition policy being established by the above committee in 1994. According to the Lean Report,[114] the principles were to:

> include all major mediums
> emphasise emerging artists
> ensure that works acquired were of high quality and in good condition
> represent recent developments in Australian contemporary art
> expand the overview of Australian contemporary art by filling gaps in the collection
> express the major themes of exploration and settlement, and the conditioning effects of the land in the creation of an Australian identity, and
> select works only by recognised professional artists who were Australian citizens or long-term residents.[115]

Assuming that Lean's reporting was accurate, an important diversion then ensued under the 1994 policy from that which operated during the establishment stage.[116] Specifically, the need to cater for all tastes among parliamentarians and staff when acquiring new works had been superseded by the goal of favouring contemporary work and preferring a continuation of the themes espoused by Giurgola of exploration and settlement of the land. On this view, the land had given the nation a special mystique, said to be responsible for the creation of an Australian identity. The stapling of Australianness to heroic conquest and control over the land ignored other contributions, for example by Indigenous and recent immigrant Australians. The 1994 acquisition policy omitted the need to cater for all tastes; instead, it focused on imagery of the land.

During Hart's tenure as consultant curator many important paintings joined the collection, including, in 1995, *Bush potato dreaming*, 1993, by Emily Kame Kngwarreye. Also acquired were large works by Tim Maguire (Figure 4), Rover Thomas (Figure 5) and Lin Onus (Figure 6).

Hart organised three public exhibitions. The first, Place and Perception: New Acquisitions, Parliament House Art Collection, opened on 16 September 1995, coinciding with Floriade and running until 29 October. Hart explains the purpose behind the acquired works on display:

> … to concentrate on the acquisition of works by artists from



Figure 4. Tim Maguire, Untitled (detail), 1995, oil on polyester canvas, 108 x 215cm. Acquired 1995. Rotational Collection. Source: ex. cat.

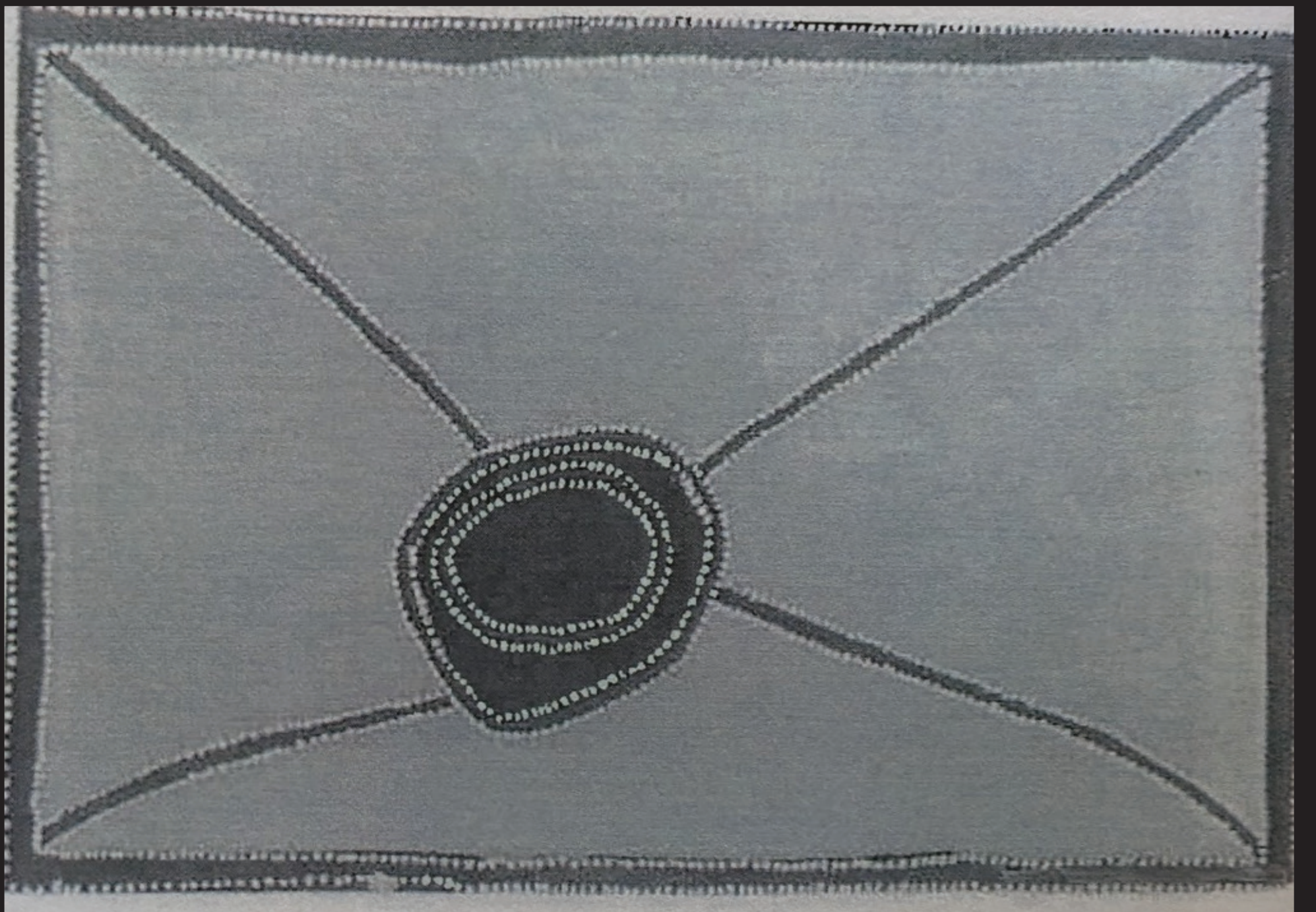


Figure 5. Rover Thomas, Warburton Ranges *(b & w rendering), 1994, natural pigments on canvas, 100 x 148 cm. Acquired 1995. Rotational Collection. Source: ex. cat.*

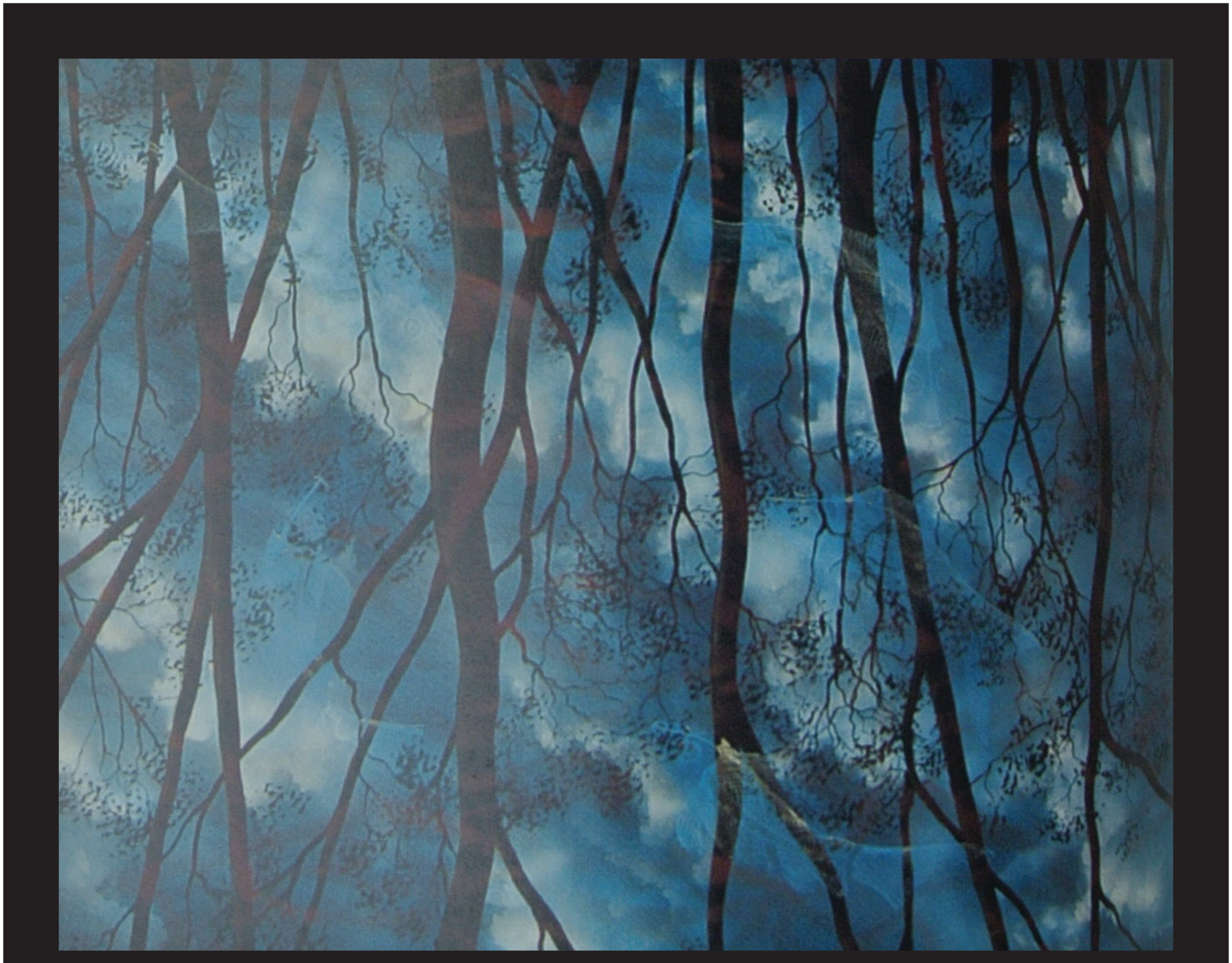


Figure 6. Lin Onus, Malwan pool – Dusk *(detail), 1994, synthetic polymer on canvas, 91 x 122 cm. Acquired 1995. Rotational Collection. Source: ex. cat.*

> Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland as a means of strengthening the nationally representative function of the Collection and encompassing a diverse range of viewpoints and approaches. The exhibition focuses predominantly on Western Australian and regional artists and will be followed next year by a further showing [Imagining the Real] of works from the current acquisition program.[117]

The exhibition consisted of 41 works of the 123 bought in 1995, a pace of acquisition not seen since Rumley's time. All but two of these works had been created after 1989, maintaining the objective of collecting contemporary work. Hart asserted the significance of the works as offering "thoughtfulness and a considerable sense of vitality" which provided "deeper insights into the dynamic cultural life of this country." Of the 34 artists represented 10 were Indigenous. Notable artists included Queenie McKenzie (Kija) and Emily Kame Kngwarreye (Anmatyerre). The work of Rover Thomas (Kukatja) entered the collection for the first time. The Indigenous communities represented were from areas around Balgo, Fitzroy Crossing and Warmun in Western Australia; Ramingining in Western Arnhem Land; and Yuendumu, Utopia and Papunya in the Northern Territory.

"A vital expression of who we all are"

The emphasis given to Indigenous artists in the newly acquired works signalled greater official recognition of the centrality of Aboriginal Australia to the nation's identity as expressed through visual culture. A reinforcement of this landmark came in the form of an expert report. In July 1992, in parallel with this exhibition history, the Keating Government appointed a panel of eminent Australians drawn from civil society to provide advice to the government on the formulation of cultural policy. The panel comprised:

> Gillian Armstrong, filmmaker
> Thea Astley, author
> Rodney Hall, Australia Council chair
> Jenny Kee, artist
> Jill Kitson, writer and broadcaster
> Michael Leslie (Gamilaraay), choreographer and dancer
> Graeme Murphy, choreographer and director
> Bruce Petty, cartoonist, writer and filmmaker
> Leo Schofield, arts critic and director, and
> Peter Spearritt, historian and academic.

The panel's report and the government's response were published in October 1994 as *Creative Nation*.[118] The panel extolled the enrichment that arises from "the meeting of imported and [post-European arrival] home-grown cultures". As for the home-grown cultures:

> It is not only from these international and local sources that the riches have come. As never before we now recognise the magnificent heritage of the oldest civilisation on earth – the civilisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people … The culture and identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians has become an essential element of Australian identity, a vital expression of who we all are.[119]

The language of the report about identity is powerful, marking a shift from privileging post-settlement European artists to encompass Indigenous and non-European immigrants' traditions. Hart's exhibition catalogue text added a provocative political statement:

> The histories of these communities [in Western Australia] are sadly bound up with the devastating legacies of white settlement and the displacement of groups of people from their homelands by pastoralists.[120]

The Place and Perception exhibition marked a new beginning for the Rotational Collection. Beahan's political authority enabled Hart to use visual culture to highlight difficult social issues affecting Indigenous Australians. At the same time, Hart was able to focus on contemporary work that had been neglected for some 10 years.

The second exhibition, Call of the Wild: Beasts and Birds from the Parliament House Art Collection, was held from 2 March to 4 April 1996, as a companion event to the Canberra Festival. Of the 50 works, three-quarters were drawn from Rumley's purchased works and one

quarter from Hart's acquisitions. The works coalesced around a broad theme of creatures that live in the open. The centrepieces were Brett Whiteley's *Elephant* (1978) and Sidney Nolan's *Explorer with camel* (1964). It might be a disservice to Hart to judge this exhibition as less brilliant than Place and Perception; however, what followed threatened the collection's existence.

The third Hart exhibition, Imagining the Real: An Exhibition of Recent Acquisitions from the Parliament House Art Collection, proved to be a key moment in the life of the Rotational Collection, serving as the trigger for a group of parliamentarians to challenge the emphasis on contemporary art. The exhibition ran from 6 June to 1 July 1996. As with Place and Perception of the previous year, Imagining the Real presented recent work from a range of established and emerging artists, with the purpose of "provid[ing] the public with a further opportunity to view and contemplate works that entered the Collection in 1995 and 1996."[121] The project was overtly directed at the public and Hart had chosen 20 significant artists including Lin Onus, Gloria Petyarre and Garry Shead.[122] All of the artists except Jon Cattapan and Tim Maguire were newly represented in the collection. Most were well-established in their careers, the youngest being Robert Foster and Stephen Nothling, each 34. None of the 10 works illustrated in the exhibition catalogue could be described as non-figurative.

Imagining the Real was staged three months after the Coalition came to office in March 1996 under Prime Minister John Howard. Robert Halverson had been appointed Speaker in April and therefore became jointly responsible for the collection. However, because of the relevant constitutional arrangements for the Senate, Beahan continued as President until 30 June, despite having lost his seat at the election. Senator Margaret Reid assumed the presidency on 20 August, the next Senate sitting day.

The change of government precipitated a reallocation of works from the Rotational Collection in parliamentarians' suites, especially for new Members and Senators. These circumstances, with the 1994 policy change—to remove the requirement to cater for all tastes—triggered some parliamentarians to agitate against the collection.

"Only a self-declared philistine would object"

Newly elected Liberal MP Ross Cameron, speaking in the House, led the intervention (see Appendix 2 for the full text). Cameron described himself as a philistine and complained about what he called the strict, elitist and completely arbitrary criteria of those selecting the works in the parliament collection. Cameron said he was seeking "something perhaps that was evocative of the beauty of the Australian landscape." He quoted fellow MP Bob Woods, who complained that "we have a collection almost entirely weighted towards the avant-garde."[123]

Cameron's speech is notable for its timing. He gave his maiden speech in the House on 23 May,[124] and as a junior member he presumably had approval for what he said or said it on instruction from a party whip. The exhibition opened on 6 June; Cameron's intervention was on 20 June. Cameron's criticisms were directed less at the exhibition ("[t]here are works of some obvious ability and interest in the exhibition"), than at the overall make-up of the collection. Cameron would have known Beahan's role as Senate President was to end in 10 days. The Coalition government would soon be in control of the collection through the new presiding officers, so why would Cameron not have waited until Margaret Reid assumed the presidency in August? The intervention was made in the House, overtly criticizing a member of the Senate, which is uncommon, and as part of an adjournment motion for which leave to speak is not required and when points of order that might block an intervention are rare. Cameron noted that other members shared his view but named Bob Woods only. The personal criticism of Beahan was forceful, characterising Beahan as proud, conceited, vainglorious, elitist and irresponsible for directing acquisitions policy and using completely arbitrary criteria in developing the collection. The timing and circumstances support the impression that the intervention was intended to diminish Beahan's contribution to the Senate.

Cameron had a firm view of the traditional art form: it is a landscape that achieves beauty using colour and the evocation of light. He had, however, overlooked that the collection already included many such works. Cameron said Beahan had "largely directed the acquisitions

policy of the Parliament in recent years" and had been responsible for the criteria applied.

Cameron's idealised conception of the collection, from his self-avowed philistine standpoint, is the depiction of the Australian landscape, which for him is the appropriate traditional form. He attributed the systematic discrimination against traditional forms to elites who prioritised the avant-garde by manipulating arbitrary criteria. Cameron had drawn cultural battlelines between the so-called elites and the intelligent public as Cameron defined it.

Art historian and academic Sasha Grishin wrote a defence of the exhibition a few days later in *The Canberra Times*, lauding the included works by Indigenous and women artists and making a thinly disguised criticism of Cameron. Grishin wrote:

> It is an excellent and representative body of work which shows something of the richness, variety and pluralism of contemporary Australian art practice, a practice which is increasingly receiving international acclaim. It is the sort of exhibition that only a self-declared philistine would object to and one which enhances the reputation of Parliament House in Canberra as a contemporary building which houses a significant collection of contemporary art.[125]

Grishin manned the ideological barricades of the time. On the other side were Carroll, Woods and Cameron, with faith in the correctness of tradition with its overtones of white male privilege. They believed that landscape scenes devoid of Indigenous people, where vigorous young British men and women set out to tame the wild, were the appropriate symbol of national identity. Against that sat Grishin's plea for a pluralist society, more tolerant and accepting of differing perspectives and of diversity in all its forms, which would represent modern Australia.

Only four Senate sitting days remained after Cameron's speech. Beahan needed to reply on the record. He tabled a statement on 27 June, the day after Grishin's article appeared, but not read aloud because of the pressure of Senate business on that day (see the full statement in Appendix 2). Beahan countered that the collection was open and argued that figuration, not avant garde work, had replaced 1980s abstraction as the dominant style. Beahan's measured tone sharpened in his concluding comments, which implied that Cameron's view was no more than "relaxation and basking in the reflected glory of past achievement." Cameron was, said Beahan, in the thrall of nostalgia and worse, had a sense of privilege manifested by the vice of indolence.

Cameron later claimed responsibility for causing the acquisition policy to be changed, marking him as a significant actor. In 1999, Cameron spoke in the House in similar terms, addressing a parliamentary committee report *It's your House: community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives*.[126] Cameron used denigration again, saying the art on display was no more than "twisted metal and household refuse," in the belief that Australians preferred his view of art, that he was the taste-maker. Cameron continued advancing the philistines-versus-the-elites argument. In 2004, journalist Jane Cadzow interviewed Cameron and wrote:

> A few months ago, when his sustained criticism of the contemporary art collection at Parliament House ended in a change to the acquisitions policy, he claimed it as a victory over the "correct, highbrow, holier-than-thou, 'you-must-like-this-shit' brigade."[127]

The collection's parliamentary antagonists had made political gains in advancing their vision of the appropriate Australian art forms: "colour and light … evocative of the beauty of the landscape."

The stage was set for the next presiding officers and a new curator to assume responsibility for the collection.

Chapter 3:

Dark days, 1997–2007

Many acquisitions and a vigorous exhibition program had been achieved during Deborah Hart's curatorship. Hart departed just as the Howard government was elected. After a short period during which Marc Bayly acted as curator, Louise Dauth was appointed Director of Art Services (the curator's role, renamed) in 1997 and stayed for almost 10 years. The change of title seems to have come about through a reorganisation of the Director position vacated by Michael Jones, and a move to employing a curator within Department of Parliamentary Services (Hart had been a consultant) to upgrade the status of the position. That title continued to the time of writing. The members of the re-formed Art Advisory Committee included the presiding officers and their deputies as well as representatives of the National Gallery and the Visual Arts Craft Fund of the Australia Council.[128]

This Advisory Committee had fewer members than in Beahan's time. Dauth's paper emphasised the primacy of the presiding officers: she wrote that "The AAC only makes recommendations to the presiding officers," suggesting a less consultative, more autocratic form of decision-making was being practised.[129]

Dauth organised two exhibitions during 1997. The first was Dreamings, a Forecourt for a Parliament: An Exhibition of Works by Artists of the Western Desert, held between 3 March and 30 April as a part of the Canberra Festival, which coincided with the International Year of the Dreaming. The exhibition consisted of the 10 paintings produced by the five Papunya artists shortlisted for the forecourt mosaic commission. A substantial exhibition catalogue was produced that included biographical information and images of the paintings submitted.[130] The introduction claimed that this was the first occasion that the 10 works had been assembled for public display, but Peter Haynes had exhibited the paintings with other works by Indigenous artists in 1993.

The second exhibition, Women's Work in the New Parliament House Art Collection: Recent Acquisitions, coincided with the Floriade festival in August 1997. The catalogue noted that the acquisitions "start to redress the under-representation of women artists in the collection." The works echoed the goals of third-wave feminism: making women visible or having the ability to shock.[131] The 13 works shown were by women artists who were or would become significant figures in Australian contemporary art, including Vivienne Binns, Lindy Lee, Tracey Moffatt and Nancy Petyarre.[132]

Dauth acquired works by highly significant artists in her first year as Director of Art Services. These included works by Tracey Moffatt (Figure 7), Lindy Lee and Patricia Piccinini (Figure 8) as well as Howard Arkley's *Theatrical Façade*, 1986 (Figure 9), Rover Thomas's *Canning Stock Route*, 1995–96 and Trevor Nickolls's *Study for on the Road*, 1995.

Other works acquired in the years 1998 to 2022 included large paintings by Tim Storrier and Guan Wei as well as many less expensive works on paper and works by emerging artists. A new financial arrangement



Figure 7. Tracey Moffatt, Something more no. 1, *1989, Cibachrome photograph, 110 x 140 cm. Acquired 1997. Rotational Collection. Source: MCA website.*



Figure 8. Patricia Piccinini, Psychogeography, *1996, editioned c-type photograph, 121 x 259 cm. Acquired 1997. Rotational Collection. Source: NGV website.*

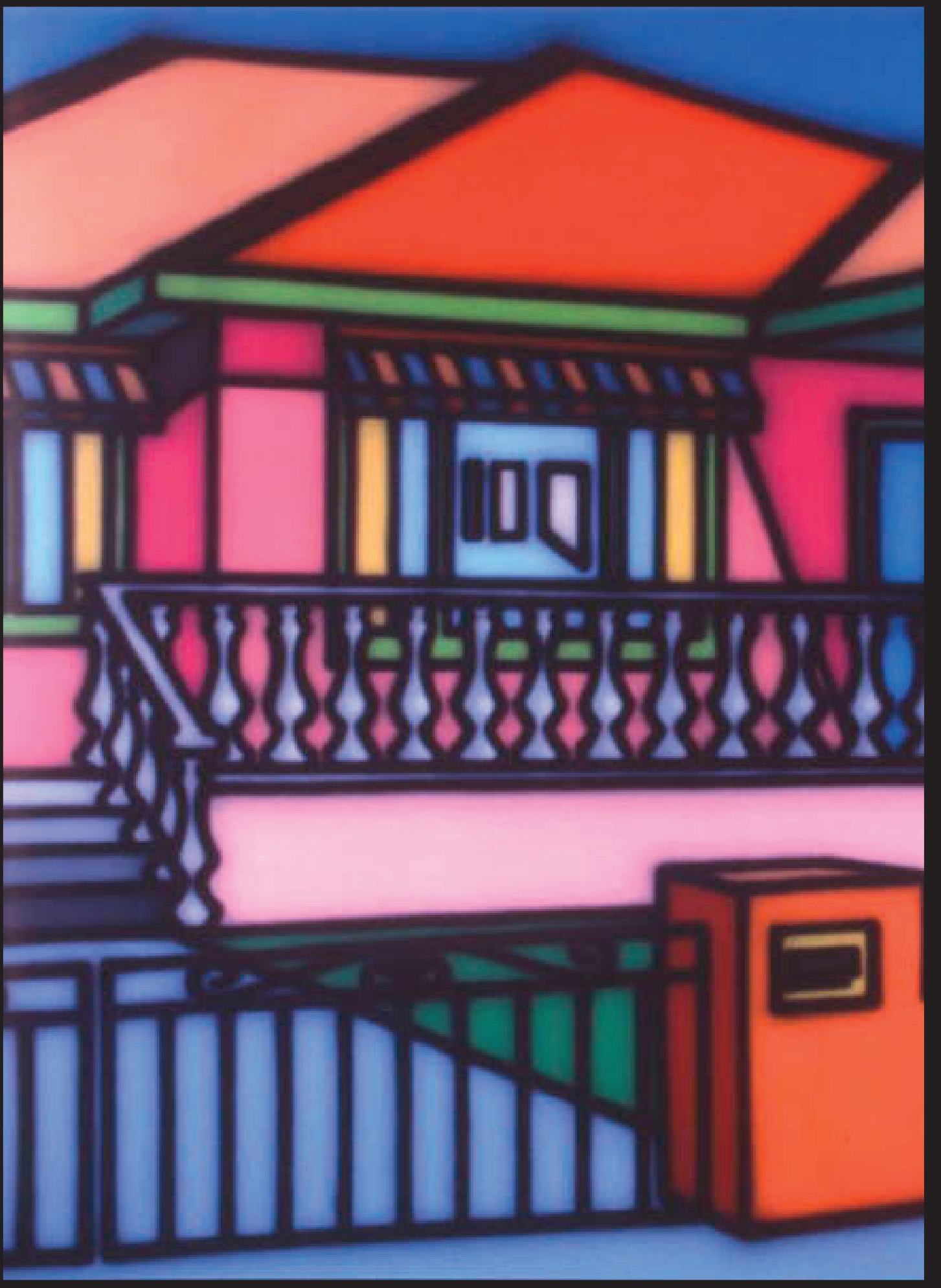


Figure 9. Howard Arkley, Theatrical facade*, 1996, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 203 x 153 cm. Acquired 1997. Rotational Collection. Source: arkleyworks.com/blog/2009/11/25/theatrical-facade-1996-canberra/.*

came into effect at this time: Department of Parliamentary Services was annually funded from consolidated revenue under the *Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments) Act*. The presiding officers thereafter established the Department's budget, allowing them to set the art budget component, which they did – to zero.

"Are we seriously that afraid of modern artistic expression?"

Under the new funding arrangement, the downward trend in acquisition numbers continued. Cameron and others pressed on with their campaign. In June 2003, Senate President Paul Calvert, who succeeded Margaret Reid in August 2002, and House Speaker Neil Andrew ordered a significant review of the Rotational Collection on whether it was fit for purpose and what the acquisitions policy should be. Jason Koutsoukis, writing in *The Australian Financial Review*, proposed that the review continued the crusade mounted by Cameron and others in 1996. Koutsoukis quoted Cameron as likening the Rotational Collection to a disease: "[a] virus built into the place by the architects who decreed that we must have as much of this modern art which none of us can relate to." Health Minister Tony Abbott was coarser in his criticism: "[i]t's just a lot of avant-garde crap, really." However, not all conservative parliamentarians sided with Cameron and Abbott. Bronwyn Bishop, a Liberal MP who later became Speaker and supervised the collection, supported contemporary art:

> It's a contemporary building – and it should have a contemporary collection. … Are we seriously that afraid of modern artistic expression?[133]

The stakes were high. Potentially, Cameron and Abbott were mobilising to decimate the collection, save for works in a style they liked. The presiding officers obliged. Former NGA Director Betty Churcher, commissioned to undertake the review, reported to the presiding officers on 23 October 2003. She said that the AAC was ineffective, being too large to gather all members, and lacked critical assessment in acquisition policy and decision-making. Churcher, argued that the AAC model reintroduced by Beahan was flawed; it had set out to replace the various "outside art experts" with the "expertise of [an] art consultant."[134] The presiding officers stopped acquisitions for the years 2003 and 2004 while considering the recommendations.

Churcher's survey elicited 107 responses from parliamentarians about the collection. She reported that the enthusiasts particularly appreciated the stimulation brought by the variety of contemporary art, ranging from abstract works to landscapes and seascapes. The detractors used language such as "dreary," "dismal" and "the product of a sick mind." Churcher confirmed that some expressed the view that abstract art was elitist and unrepresentative of broader Australia, preferring colonial imagery and works referencing achievements in immigration, agriculture, mining and farming.[135] Churcher concluded:

> There seems to have been no decision taken to provide the variety of choice that is necessary for the range of preferences that exist. Some Senators and Members are perfectly comfortable with contemporary abstract art and will continue to select from this major part of the collection, others will want works of art that they can more easily relate to, or relate to their electorates or ministries.[136]

Churcher conceded that abstract art was not to everyone's taste and said the balance between styles in the collection did not reflect the preferences of parliamentarians. In her report, she was uncritical of people's preferences, emphasizing instead the need to ensure that the quality of acquisitions was high, regardless of genre or style. Directly addressing the preference for landscapes, Churcher singled out artists Arthur Boyd, Sidney Nolan, Fred Williams, Gloria Petyarre, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri and William Robinson as meeting an acceptable standard of quality.[137] Churcher, in redirecting the debate about "avant-garde crap" to a discussion of substance rather than style, upheld the proposition that all styles are valid but not all works have value.

On the other hand, Churcher did not refute the original assumption that the public was essentially ignorant of contemporary art and susceptible to being overwhelmed by it. Rather, in equating quality to "a demonstrable professional track record," she upheld critical

acclaim over mass popularity.[138] By implication, Churcher was reinforcing her stance that assessments should be made by experts not parliamentarians, who, despite their privileged role, are not necessarily equipped to discern quality. Churcher's inference that the preferences of politicians should be a determining factor in future acquisition processes entailed practical limitations: "As occupancy of suites changes from time to time, acquisitions into the permanent collection cannot be based entirely on personal preferences." Churcher nevertheless reasserted her larger point: "There should however be a greater diversity of choice for Senators and Members."[139]

A further issue arose relating to the diversity of the collection. Churcher approved the acquisition of Aboriginal art during the 1980s but recommended that "a focus could now turn to contemporary Asian art to reflect the diversity of our society." She acknowledged that doing so would not necessarily cater to politicians' preferences.

Churcher recommended that emerging artists should not be favoured and that artists need not be living. She emphasised that the quest for diversity should include acquiring works from under-represented regions or electorates and should acknowledge Australia's multicultural society.

Churcher had thereby curtailed the collection's contemporary nature by reducing the proportion of work by emerging artists that was acquired. She recommended preferring established or deceased artists "who reflect the best of Australian art," but in recommending that more works should come from regional areas, she made this task even more difficult.

Speaker Neil Andrew made a statement to the House on 17 June 2004, responding to Churcher's recommendations:

> I should emphasise that the new approach accepted by the President and me will not mean that the work of new and emerging artists will cease to be acquired. It will mean that new acquisitions will not be restricted to emerging artists solely. The general criteria for selecting artworks for the Rotational Collection will be that the artist has appropriate professional standing and that the work is suitable to be added to that collection.[140]

Andrew's statement was not supported by the facts. The acquisition policy had never been directed solely to emerging artists; rather, the data presented showed that established artists had been preferred. Furthermore, professional standing and suitability or appropriateness are highly subjective assessments. The implication was that works previously acquired had been by emerging artists who were without professional standing, and that the works were unsuitable. Andrew continued:

> The point should be made that the current acquisition guidelines express a preference for first-point-of-sale acquisitions, and this has effectively precluded consideration of the purchase of appropriate works from established artists, alive or dead. That issue has now been addressed.

This statement was also not factual. A preference is not a precondition. Acquiring a Streeton landscape for a backbencher's office had always been a possibility, however unlikely. Andrew, with the concurrence of the Senate President, endorsed Churcher's recommendation for greater geographical representation, but ignored the recommendation to actively seek contemporary art by Asian Australians.

"They wanted oil paintings of distinguished white men"

Ultimately, without doubting Churcher's best intentions and professional integrity, I feel her report was used as a political tool by Howard, Cameron, Abbott and their faceless backers. Specifically, Churcher's impartiality was used to sanctify the desired end that works by long-dead artists, conceivably even of the Heidelberg School, could now be acquired. Some in the Parliament exposed this as the hidden agenda. In the Senate, John Faulkner expressed his suspicions in this way:

> My first concern about this whole issue is the motivation for the establishment of the Betty Churcher inquiry, the review of the Parliament House art collection and art collections policy. What motivated it? It appears that it was motivated by complaints from coalition MPs. They had complained that the current artwork in Parliament House which is by living Australian artists, is – and I quote directly – 'avant-garde crap' and the products of sick minds. What did some of these complainants, like Tony Abbott, have to say? Tony Abbott and his key co-complainant, Mr Ross Cameron MP, the member for Parramatta, asked for a few more old – or, if not old, then old-fashioned – oil paintings and, if possible, oil paintings of distinguished white men, around the building. That is what they wanted. They wanted those paintings to adorn the walls of Parliament House.[141]

Labor's arts spokesperson Kate Lundy was more direct:

> This review, as is typical of cultural reviews instigated by the Howard Government, is yet another example of Howard's war on culture and his view that Australian culture and the telling of our history should only focus on the great achievements of Anglo-Saxon males in Australia, rather than the complex and diverse stories that accurately reflect Australian culture.[142]

Faulkner and Lundy's statements had ratcheted up to something we might recognise as culture-war rhetoric. An even more strident opinion was expressed by former AAC member, critic and curator John McDonald, who felt parliamentarians were only comfortable with "[t]he sun-filled landscapes of the Heidelberg School and the parochial writings of the *Bulletin* [generating] self-satisfaction of a people who had been able to conquer a wild, unforgiving terrain."[143] McDonald, writing a year after Churcher's report, thought the collection "would be seen as highly conservative by most art experts," and labelled the likes of Cameron and Abbott "militant philistines."[144]

The imprimatur that the Speaker gave to buying Australian old masters was redundant, however. The Department of Parliamentary Services Annual Report of that year admitted there was no funding for such acquisitions:

> In June 2004 the Presiding Officers announced in-principle responses to many of Mrs Churcher's recommendations. First, the acquisition is no longer to focus on the works of new and emerging artists, but will allow a wider range of acquisitions on the basis that the artist has appropriate professional standing and the work is suitable to be added to the Collection. This change in the acquisitions policy will not preclude acquiring the work of new or emerging artists, and the funding constraints affecting the Collection mean that new and emerging artists may continue to represent a significant proportion of acquisitions. Separately from the PHAC, an alternative collection of reproductions is to be acquired to provide Senators and Members with a broader choice of works to hang in their suites. These reproductions would not be accessioned into the Collection (for this reason, it is not clear that funds for purchasing these reproductions will be available in the short term). The Art Advisory Committee, to decide on acquisitions into the Collection, will be constituted by the Presiding Officers as joint chairs, the Deputy Speaker, the Deputy President and Chairman of Committees, and the Secretary of DPS. Further work is to be done on the implementation of Mrs Churcher's other recommendations.[145]

Collecting had stalled, and the stop-gap measure of sourcing reproductions to decorate suites was offered. But even that budget-conscious strategy was unfunded.

Churcher's other recommendations were sidelined. The presiding officers placed acquisitions "on hold" (except, curiously, for 2005) for the remainder of the Howard government's term while Churcher's recommendations were considered further.[146] All 77 acquisitions in 2005 were works on paper and relatively inexpensive. Notable among them were works by Charles Blackman, Robert Jacks, David Larwill and Judy Watson.

Despite the cessation of acquisitions and exhibitions from 2003, the

Howard government ultimately implemented a changed acquisition policy in 2007 as one of its final acts in government (see Appendix 3).[147] The same policy remained in force at the time of writing.

Significantly, the requirement that works be of high quality had been removed, replaced in clauses 3, 5(d) and 6(d) by the overarching requirement that a work must be of an appropriate character and subject matter, must complement the dignity of the building and must be suitable for general viewing. Furthermore, various styles are permissible but only if the subject matter is about Australian landscape or Australian life including culture, character and identity. More significantly, a complete power shift arose from adopting the test of appropriate subject matter and Australian character. This was to be judged by the presiding officers alone, rendering redundant all previous curatorial determinations and potentially frustrating future acquisition and exhibition plans. Adopting appropriateness as the overarching criterion gives absolute discretion to the presiding officers, which can be used to advance personal preferences or arbitrariness. Worse, the criterion was designed to prevent acquisitions that would further expand the collection. The curatorial staff were in the invidious position of being overruled by the personal preferences of the presiding officers and could be criticised by parliamentarians promoting an ideological agenda.

The period from 1989 to 2007 had been tumultuous for the collection, which had begun those decades somewhat under-sized, plundered and under-resourced. The will of Senate President Michael Beahan restarted acquisitions. The move to buying younger artists' work exclusively (rather than established artists such as Brack, Whiteley, Williams and Rees as in Rumley's time) emboldened certain conservative parliamentarians within the Howard government. They pursued an agenda favouring colonial-era nostalgia, a campaign that ultimately succeeded in placing decision-making about acquisitions into the hands of the presiding officers, giving them almost complete discretion. Despite this power shift, dedicated curators Peter Haynes, Deborah Hart and Louise Dauth succeeded in promoting wider topics such as the ramifications of settlement for Indigenous Australians and the effects of Asian migration.

Many significant works of art had been added to the collection notwithstanding budget challenges. The culture war ceased with a change of government in 2007.

Chapter 4:

Happier times, 2007–24

Louise Dauth departed at the end of the Howard government's term. Labor came to power under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in December 2007. Kylie Scroope was appointed Director of Art Services. A representative of the NGA became a member of the reconstituted Art Advisory Committee (initially Elena Taylor followed by Deborah Hart in her second role with the collection), which could recommend works for acquisition. In the final months of the Howard government, Art consultant Merryn Gates became external expert advisor, a position recommended by Churcher.[148] The Churcher Report had specified that the consultant should have an established network into dealer galleries and artists and was unconcerned about whether the consultant at the same time "may be buying for other corporate or private collections."[149]

Acquisitions recommenced immediately, at high levels not seen since Michael Beahan's time. The cap of $100,000 instituted by the Howard government was removed and some $450,000 was spent in one year. In the period from early 2008 up to the delivery of the Lean Report in May 2009, Gates is credited with addressing some of the criticisms of the Churcher Report on increasing diversity and providing variety for parliamentary suites while imposing personal touches. Lean noted low-cost acquisitions, made in 2008, that included prints, photographs and craft objects by unnamed Indigenous artists as well as "many artworks by females."[150] Acquisitions included contemporary objects in glass by Ben Edols and Kathy Elliot. Works by previously unrepresented Indigenous Tasmanians were acquired: *Palawa Shell Necklace*, 1992 by Muriel Maynard (Trawlwoolway) and *The Wait*, 2008 by Julie Gough (Trawlwoolway). Works by artists of mixed cultural heritage included *Opossum Skin Coat* by Lorraine Connolly-Northey (Irish and Wiradjuri heritage). Peter Walsh's *Kakadu* was said by Lean to have arisen from a cross-cultural art camp in West Arnhem Land sponsored by the Australia Council for the Arts (later called Creative Australia). Artists from the Torres Strait Islands were supported through the acquisition of works by Dennis Nona and Alick Tipoti. From Western Australia, *Shark Bay* and *Jurien, WA* by Trent Park were acquired. Antarctica was represented in landscapes by Jan Senbergs and Jörg Schmeisser. The favoured Australian mainland landscape was shown in Robyn Stacey's photography and works by Cowboy Louie Pwerle (Yolngu) and Angie Pwerle Ngala (Yolngu). Under-represented genres were acquired including mixed-media works by Danie Mellor (Mamu–Ngangan–Ngajan) and Michael Riley (Wiradjuri–Kamilaroi).

Gates extended the collection's range to artists with disabilities, acquiring quadriplegic Richard Maurovic's *Landing Lights Near Adelaide Airport*, 2006. Images of sports and other physical pursuits were represented by *Making Waves*, 2007 by Stephen Bowers; Peter Walker was added as were four works by Regan Tamanui depicting famous sports people.[151]

Gates had largely resisted the opportunity provided by the 2007 acquisition policy to acquire older pictures of gum trees and homesteads. Instead, with increased funds, she had recommended expensive major works by contemporary artists such as Judy Watson (Wakirti–Warlpiri), Christopher Pease (Minang–Wardandi–Bibbulmun), Vernon Ah Kee (Kuku Yalandji–Waanji–Yidinji–Gugu Yimithirr) and Shaun Gladwell.

"Alienating artists and their dealers"

Towards the end of the second Rudd Government, Department of Parliamentary Services commissioned historians Roslyn Russell and Louise Douglas to undertake a review of the Rotational and Gifts Collections; they reported in August 2013. The authors observed that the bi-annual meetings of the Art Advisory Committee meant that important works were missed while awaiting approval. Russell and Douglas criticised the Committee in another way. Works proposed for acquisition that had been placed on reserve by Scroope or Gates were being rejected on cost alone, thereby alienating artists and their dealers. Fleur Anderson in *The Australian Financial Review* quotes Scroope explaining the Committee's decision-making process:

> "Mostly it is about 90 per cent approvals," Scroope says. "It is the right of the committee to say they don't understand it or whatever. But the vast majority of the time they say 'yes'."[152]

Scroope implied that the presiding officers occasionally rejected a work proposed for acquisition because they did not understand it. Such rejections were probably based on arbitrariness and personal preferences rather than aesthetic merit or compliance with the stated acquisition policy. Russell and Douglas said Scroope had complained that none of the AAC members other than her, Hart and Gates had a formal visual arts background, which was presumably the cause of uninformed decision-making. Russell and Douglas expressed some sympathy with Scroope's view, leaving open the idea of adding some form of expert panel to the Advisory Committee's organisation. More significantly, they made a backhanded criticism of the chairing of the Committee meetings, saying "[a] good chair gives the direction 'does this address the policy?'."[153]

Russell and Douglas recommended the establishment of terms of reference for the Advisory Committee that included the role of the chair as well as voting and decision-making procedures.[154] Russell and Douglas thus implied that the presiding officers occasionally acted out of personal preference, averting the need for any committee vote. The usual majority decision-making convention familiar to parliamentary law-making probably does not apply in this case, because the Committee's function is to advise not decide. That position is reinforced by the presiding officers' sole responsibility for the collection, which includes a veto power over acquisitions.

Scroope staged at least four public exhibitions during the Labor government years:

- 2008: New Indigenous works (title unknown)
- 2009: New Acquisitions – Contemporary Landscape Art in the Parliament House Art Collection
- 2013: 25 Treasures – Land, Landscape, Identity (guest-curated by Peter Haynes), and
- 2013: Parliament House Art Collection, New Acquisitions 2011–13.

No catalogue has been identified for the 2013 New Acquisitions exhibition, but Russell and Douglas referred to other works acquired in that two-year period. They wrote:

> Of the 18 works on display, nine were by Indigenous artists, reflecting the large number of Indigenous works that have entered the collection since 1994. The artists came from all States and Territories of Australia, and at least three of them were migrants to Australia. More than ten of the artists are women (a group of Aboriginal women working with their father were responsible for one large painting). The exhibition displayed the work of well-known artists such as Fiona Hall, Reg Mombassa, Judy Watson, the late Jörg Schmeisser, Julie Dowling and Shaun Gladwell, and introduced many visitors to the work of emerging artists as well. As a sampling of new works in the Rotational Collection, the exhibition demonstrated cultural and geographical diversity, a range of styles and media and an interesting mix of subject matter.[155]

Works by established and emerging artists were also acquired.

Scroope departed at around the time Tony Abbott became prime minister in September 2013 and was replaced as Director of Art

Services by Justine van Mourik. Merryn Gates, whose contract ended at that time, was not replaced; the responsibility for acquisitions reverted to van Mourik as Director. Deborah Hart continued as the sole external expert consultant on the Advisory Committee, which otherwise comprised the presiding officers and their deputies as wells as the Department of Parliamentary Services secretary. This narrowed the aesthetic sensibilities of the body and fostered control by the Advisory Committee over the collection's further development. Van Mourik played an expanded role, sourcing works for acquisition and maintaining the collection. The increased responsibilities might help explain why so few exhibitions were mounted.

The rate of acquisitions was initially sustained following the change of government. Acquisitions during Tony Abbott's term as prime minister included two major still-life paintings by Margaret Olley and three graphic posters by Martin Sharp; both were significant Australian artists not previously represented in the collection. Olley had ceased to paint and exhibit in the early 2000s, according to the Art Gallery of New South Wales.[156] Van Mourik confirmed to me that two works were acquired in the primary market from Olley's estate because Olley "had … been overlooked previously."[157] The works were not strictly contemporary, but the acquisition policy had sufficient flexibility to justify their purchase.

"Internecine jealousies and back-room deals"

Many parliamentarians demonstrated great fondness for the Rotational Collection even coveting certain works despite a few of their colleagues being openly critical. Fleur Anderson, writing about the Rotational Collection in *The Australian Financial Review* in 2009, identified two camps:

> There are internecine jealousies and back-room deals by some art-loving pollies to secure coveted works, while others delegate the task of choosing artworks to their staff or dismiss the little-known perk of office as an unnecessary cost to taxpayers.[158]

When Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard reportedly sought to have a work by Tracey Moffatt (Figure 7) for her suite, Anderson observed:

> Gillard first snaffled the piece from the collection while in opposition after it appeared in one of the opposition's meeting rooms. The famous and evocative image of a woman in a red cheongsam outside a bush shack and watched by two children, a man in a coolie hat and a seductive blonde, was taken down to Parliament House's basement earlier this year for a long stretch in the dark to increase the longevity of the work.

In *The Guardian* in 2019, Sarah Martin reported benevolent covetousness on the part of Sussan Ley, at that time Assistant Minister for Regional Development and Territories and Minister for the Environment:

> Ley eyed off the jellyfish painting, painted by Kokoberrin woman Lisa Michl Ko-manggén from the west coast of Cape York Peninsula when it was hanging in Ken Wyatt's office – an office she now occupies. "The painting was in the office when Ken Wyatt was there and he was kind enough to allow it to remain when the offices were changed with the new ministries," Ley said. "I liked the painting from the moment I saw it and asked if it could be kept there."[159]

Such examples of works being squabbled over show that the popularity of the collection had grown strongly from the hesitations of the JSC to commit to the works purchased for the parliamentary suites in the early 1980s.

Abbott was replaced as prime minister in September 2015 by Malcolm Turnbull. Significant works added to the collection during Turnbull's prime ministership included Ben Quilty's *Lead shot Rorschach* (Figure 11) and William Mackinnon's *You know what I mean* (Figure 12).

A change in priorities was about to occur. In June 2016, to mark Reconciliation Week, the Speaker, on behalf of the presiding officers, unveiled a major acquisition of 18 sculptures by Utopia artist Dinny Kunoth Kemarre; the works represented players from each AFL team at the time. During 2015 and 2016, significant acquisitions to mark the



*Figure 10. Lisa Michl Ko-manggén, Kedervent (*Jellyfish story*), 2008, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, c. 150 x 120 cm. Acquired 2009. Rotational Collection. Photo by author.*

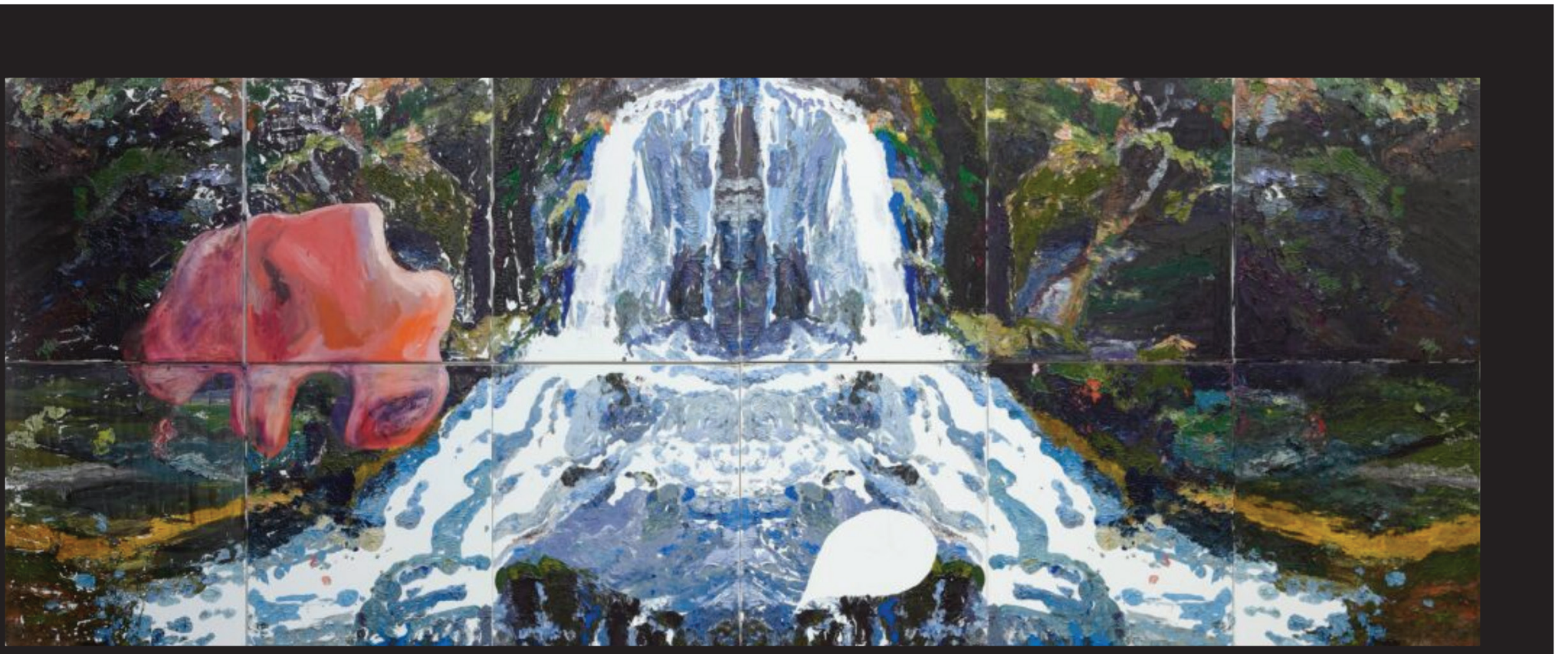


Figure 11. Ben Quilty, Lead shot Rorschach*, 2013, oil and graphite on linen, 200 x 600 cm. Acquired 2015. Rotational Collection. Source: artist's website.*



Figure 12. William Mackinnon, You know what I mean*, 2015, synthetic polymer paint and oil on canvas, 180 x 120 cm, Acquired 2016. Rotational Collection. Source: APH website.*

Centenary of Anzac included works by Alan Luke Sciberras, Catherine O'Donnell, Jennie Kemarre Martiniello, Robert Hannaford, Michael Keighery and Brian Robinson. Speaker Tony Smith made an intriguing comment in 2016 about Dinny Kunoth Kemarre's sculptures:

> "This wonderful new addition to the collection combines two of Australia's abiding passions – art and sport," he said. "It is fitting that these two passions should come together so successfully in this work of art, and as a celebration of Reconciliation Week on behalf of all Australians."[160]

The highlighting of art and sport represented a pull towards the mainstream of Australian life, a retreat from stimulating contemporary works of art towards the middle ground:

> New acquisitions included 26 works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists from across Australia. In December 2014 the Presiding Officers approved an additional allocation of $200,000 for the purchase of artworks over the period 2014–18 to mark the Centenary of ANZAC; four works were purchased from this funding allocation in 2016–17.[161]

Speaker Stephen Smith also noted:

> ... the purchase of 57 works of art including 16 to commemorate the Centenary of ANZAC.[162]

Vigorous support for the work of Indigenous artists continued, but the absence of collecting from artists of Asian cultural background largely remained. Set against this was a new priority, based on appropriateness, focusing on civil society's interest in sport. Works of protest continued to be eschewed; however, there was no hesitation about valorising deeds of war manifested in the revered Anzac mythology. The presiding officers had taken the collection into uncharted territory. The subject matters of sport and warfare had not previously featured in acquisition policies and represented an original policy adaptation on the Speaker's part. It is difficult to identify which principles in the 2007 Acquisition Policy were satisfied by such subject matter. There is a collateral argument that commemorating warfare is not "appropriate to the function of Parliament House;" rather, that is the function of the Australian War Memorial or at least the Historic Memorials Collection. The presiding officers decided to acquire the atypical subject matter through an additional allocation of $200,000. This action emphasised how decisions on acquisitions could be manipulated in subject matter and in funding through the legislative appropriation process.

A single exhibition, Length and Breadth: New Acquisitions from the Parliament House Art Collection, was mounted during the Turnbull years and ran for two months in 2016. No catalogue was produced, but the text of the Parliamentary website at the time stated:

> **Length & Breadth, New acquisitions from the Parliament House Art Collection.**
> From the Flinders Ranges to the Darling Downs, Bathurst Harbour to Broken Hill, this exhibition features a selection of contemporary Australian artworks acquired by Parliament House since 2013. Focusing on images of landscape, both real and imagined, from across the vast Australian continent.
>
> **Featuring artists:** Louise Feneley, Mel George, Pro Hart, Ray Ken, William Mackinnon, Joseph McGlennon, Karen Mills, Ian North, Amanda Parer, Ben Quilty, Ian Waldron, Nicole Welsh, Carolyn Young and Keturah Nangala Zimran.
>
> **Date:** 22 September – 13 November 2016
> Location: Presiding Officers' Exhibition Area
> Cost: free[163]

That the first exhibition for three years focused on landscape paintings is interesting. The commentary pointed out that the works had been acquired since 2013 and were of the favoured landscape genre, which was thought appropriate at that time.

"The first-time new works in the collection have been displayed to the public since 2016"

Exhibition activity under the Morrison government was largely sidelined until van Mourik staged New Acquisitions: Contemporary Identity and Land, from 26 May to 7 November 2021. This was recorded in the Department of Parliamentary Services Annual Report:

> In May, an exhibition celebrating new acquisitions for the Parliament House Art Collections opened in the Presiding Officers' Exhibition Area—it was the first-time new works in the collection have been displayed to the public since 2016.[164]

The exhibition was important, marking the evolution of the Rotational Collection from that established by Katrina Rumley until 1988 to the works added more recently. Individual works by 22 artists were exhibited in a wide range of media, from ceramics and glass to paintings, prints and sculpture.

The theme was "how identity and a sense of connection are forged in landscape and place."[165] All of the works had been purchased between 2016 and 2020 and had been produced from 2013 to 2020. The larger-scale works were presumably intended for the general circulation areas and the smaller pieces for parliamentarians' suites. About half the works were created by Indigenous artists. Notable for their cultural expression and artistic significance were Christian Thompson's *Writing on the wall*, 2019 (Figure 13) Mabel Juli's *Garnkiny Ngarranggarni (Moon Dreaming)*, 2014 and Aunty Marlene Gilson's *On the road to Ballarat*, 2020.

Van Mourik estimated that some three-quarters of the works acquired during her term as Director were for parliamentarians' suites and the remainder for the general circulation areas.[166] Evidently no works were purchased for public spaces; this further diminished one of the original purposes of the collection, which was to serve the public rather than decorate areas for private and corporate functions. The nature of the works intended for the general circulation areas showed a shift in curatorial emphasis towards large-scale paintings, mostly by the leading artists mentioned above. Russell and Douglas echoed this shift to acquiring prominent artists, writing in their 2013 report: "[t]here has been a discussion paper on significant artists whose work is not included in the collection."[167]

In 2023, the public exhibition space showed the development of the Coats of Arms on the forecourt veranda, in the Senate and House Chambers and at the ministerial entrance, all commissioned in the 1980s. The exhibition, Representing the Nation: Australia's Coat of Arms, demonstrated the potency and primacy of official symbolism over contemporary cultural expressions. The wall text explained:

> Explore the Coat of Arms' evolution and symbolism at Parliament House's *Representing the Nation: Australia's Coat of Arms* exhibition. Discover the stories of the Coat of Arms' creation and meanings through historic objects, artworks and decorative crafts from collections including the Parliament House Art Collection and Art/Craft Program. The exhibition explores how the evolution of the Coat of Arms parallels Australia's developing sense of self and place in the world.[168]

The boast of offering a unique perspective on art arguably could be better made of the Rotational Collection, given its far greater size and sweep of subject matter. What is being expressed about a "sense of self and place in the world" rests on a formal, highly politicised symbol created to instil pride in nationhood, not foster contemplation and acknowledgement of the diversity of Australian culture. This is perhaps an underwhelming endpoint for the chronology presented, in that the aspirations expressed by Aldo Giurgola appear to have been forgotten, replaced by newly inscribed secular symbols such as sport, Anzac and the Coat of Arms.

But it would be wrong to say that quality works of art have been forsaken. Apolline Kohen, who replaced Justine van Mourik as Director of Art Services in June 2021, acquired an important work by Richard Bell in 2024 (Figure 14).



Figure 13. Christian Thompson, Writing on the Wall, *2019, editioned c-type print on metallic paper, 250 x 250 cm. Acquired 2019. Rotational Collection. Source: Michael Reid Sydney website.*



Figure 14. Richard Bell (Kamilaroi, Kooma, Jiman, Gurang peoples), Freedom Rides*, 2023, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 244.5 x 3.5cm. Acquired 2024. Rotational Collection. Photo by author.*

Conclusions

At the time of writing, 35 years had passed since Parliament's art collection was established. Justine van Mourik in one article described her role and the art selected for parliamentarians' suites and general circulation areas this way:

> It is like running a big regional gallery inside a miniature super council, except there are 227 [sic] councillors … The purpose of art in the building is not to be a gallery, it really is more to provide a kind of environment that is conducive to work, it is more of a domestic setting. It's like furnishing a very large house. You want things that people can live with given how much time people spend in this building. [But] it is also about providing inspiration, we don't want people to walk past the same thing every day for three years.[169]

Van Mourik's analogy of the suites' fulfilling a domestic rather than corporate function recalls:

> Sir Joseph Burke's "rooms otherwise messed up [by] those with the worst taste",
>
> Katrina Rumley and Pam Berg's "domestic" characterisation from 1984, and
>
> Michael Baume's "snouts in the art trough" criticism from 1988.

However, the acquisition policy current at the time of writing no longer made a distinction between the type of art selected for suites and the general circulation areas. The result was that art intended for the parliamentarians' suites became susceptible to personal preference. The works displayed in the circulation areas had striven to express a national cultural and aesthetic vitality, but that virtue could no longer be assured. The handful of works remaining on display in the public areas of Parliament seemed tokenistic.

The audience within Parliament, including parliamentarians and staff, can have various conceptions of the collection's function and purpose. In broad-brush terms, there are examples where parliamentarians consider the collection as a personal possession, while staff might see the art displayed throughout the building as powerful expressions of Australia's self-image as a nation confident of its modernity. Indeed, Betty Churcher wrote in her 2003 report about the need to understand the collection as reflecting the legislative function of Parliament:

> The rationale of the Collection should be more in line with a large corporation collection than with the public art gallery. It should be thought of as an integral part of the fabric of the building and maintained as such. Like a corporate collection, this Collection aims to reflect the core function of the building, and enhance the environment for the building's occupants. There is therefore no responsibility to promote the Collection outside the walls of Parliament House, to mount exhibitions, tour aspects of the Collection, or publish. This doesn't of course preclude any of these activities; it simply removes the obligation to justify the Collection's existence.[170]

Churcher's implication was that the nature and operation of the collection between 1988 and 2003 had been confused and in need of re-definition.

I argue that in 2026 the collection exists in two distinct parts. Firstly,

there are 226 privately curated selections for the suites occupied by the 75 Senators and 151 Members drawn from an exceptional stockroom which caters for all tastes. Secondly, the restricted general circulation areas house a professionally curated, open collection of excellent large-scale works placed for the enjoyment of people working in the building. This new configuration was enabled by the presiding officers' gaining a wide power to accept or reject proposals put forward for acquisition. In doing so they relied on their judgment of appropriateness. They also used general discretion, demonstrated for example by the 10 per cent of proposed acquisitions rejected during Kylie Scroope's curatorship; and during Justine van Mourik's time, alternative works by the same artists had to be resubmitted when they became available. The nostalgia for colonial-era subject matter was replaced or supplemented by works on popular themes such as sport and the Anzac mythology. The heart of Rotational Collection at the time of writing resembled an aggregation of suburban homes whose owners yearned for the familiarity of times past, much like Howard Arkley's phantasmagorical vision of life in the suburbs (Figure 9).

Afterword

In the chapters of this book, I have recounted the story as objectively as I could, but in this Afterword, I outline further thoughts I have had about the collection.

Gains have been made since the time in the wilderness around 1990 and the culture wars of the 2000s. The collection appears generally well-liked by parliamentarians and therefore is at a low risk of being dispersed. Funding for acquisitions is guaranteed through annual appropriations. Despite this, the presiding officers can apply personal preferences and deviate from stated acquisition policy.

This chronology has touched along the way on the art of Indigenous Australians. At one point that art was described by a group of prominent citizens as "an essential element of Australian identity, a vital expression of who we all are."[171] Some observers have thought that Parliament has bought too much Indigenous art; others have seen the proportion as adequate.

In May 2025, the proportion of Indigenous works was 20 per cent (659 of 3325 items). Is 20 per cent an appropriate representation? The Rotational Collection is non-specialised: the only strict condition has been that the works collected be by Australian nationals or resident artists. Other conditions have become discretionary. The policy (see Appendix 3) recognises the pluralist nature of Australian society and calls for the diversity of the cultures, characters and identities of Australia to be accommodated. I do not agree with the point raised by Betty Churcher that appropriate representation should be tied to the proportion of the population who identify as Indigenous Australians, which is about 2.5 per cent. I think Indigenous Australian art does need to be emphasised as a form of cultural diplomacy: to practically acknowledge the long history of civilisation in Australia, especially for official visitors to the Parliament. There must also I think be a greater effort made to broaden holdings of art by peoples who have come from elsewhere to make their home in Australia.

"I have offended the cafe latte set"

I discern a squeamishness among political conservatives, a cohort who avoid controversy. The contested issue of appropriateness arose during Tony Abbott's term through the figure of conservative MP Craig Kelly. Justine van Mourik had mounted a small exhibition of 14 works, some of which were evidently borrowed from other collections, in October 2014, on the theme of *The Art of Shakespeare*. The display attracted controversy because of partial nudity in *The Witches* by Wendy Sharpe (Figure 15).

Journalist Matthew Knott, writing in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, reported Kelly's reaction as:

> "Appalling" is how he labels the work – and much of the contemporary art on display in Parliament House. "Obviously everyone has different tastes, but I would say a naked backside goes a bit far – the average punter on the street would question this," he said. "People can call me a philistine, that's fine. In this job you need a thick hide."[172]

The picture was tame by contemporary media standards and could readily be justified by overt references to female sexuality in Shakespeare's work. Thus, many would consider Sharpe's painting to be inoffensive. Kelly, however, saw himself as a representative of the "average punter", a guardian of the public's sensibilities and the judge of appropriateness. Kelly took the arbiter's role in a surprising direction, reacting immediately to Knott's article by speaking in the Federation Chamber on the same day that the article was published:

> I have a confession to make: I have offended the cafe latte set. I have offended them with the comments I made about the artwork here in Parliament House, much of which I referred



Figure 15. Wendy Sharpe, The Witches*, 2016, oil on linen, 160 x 146 cm. AGNSW Collection. Source: AGNSW.*

to as being appalling. I also offended them when I said that, when it comes to some of the artwork here, perhaps I am missing something because I did not pay attention at art classes in school. I have been subject to hostile abuse from the culturally and morally superior, who join in the groupthink: when they see a piece of contemporary art, they think that they get it and we do not.

But they miss the point entirely. Everyone's choice in art is their own personal choice, and if there is anything such as good art it is art that actually gets a reaction, whether positive or negative, and that is exactly what has happened, thankfully, through my comments. The artist Wendy Sharpe—whose work I must admit I admire and who does some wonderful work—following the comments I made about one of her artworks which is hanging in our Parliament House, has had a story about her and her artwork in today's *Sydney Morning Herald*. This is priceless publicity that she has received for her artwork. So, I actually look forward to maybe getting a job sometime in the future as her publicist, or maybe even to her slinging me a commission for the priceless publicity I have given her.

The second point I would make about art is the opportunities that we are missing here in Parliament House. We have miles and miles [of] corridors in this Parliament House. We have thousands of foreign tourists visiting this Parliament House. This should be a great opportunity to showcase Australian artwork. I would like to see more Aboriginal artwork hanging here in Parliament House. Let's have more of it here. We have the corridor space. Let's expose it to the foreign tourists that come in. Who knows? Madam Deputy Speaker [Natasha Griggs, Liberal Party], I know you have a great appreciation of local artists. Tourists may buy a tie or a scarf or something with an Aboriginal print fabric to take back home. Let's have more of our historical pictures and our artwork telling the story of our nation building. Let's have more pictures of our coastline, our Outback and our unique wildlife. These are the opportunities that we have to promote artwork here in our Parliament House. We need to do it. We only have to look at this chamber and some of the wonderful pieces of artwork that are out on display. I have taken the opportunity to go and visit our art department down in the basement. Let's not hide our artwork down there. Let's get it out. Let's get it on display. Let's promote what we have. Let's get in and talk and encourage the arts.[173]

Kelly had resurrected the elites argument prosecuted by Ross Cameron and others, asserting that the "average punter" can appreciate contemporary art just as much as the "culturally and morally superior." Although Kelly was outraged by buttocks, he did vigorously support greater access to art in Parliament House. And yet, while perpetuating an "us and them" contest, Kelly had backtracked somewhat to extol certain aspects of the collection. He lobbied for greater exposure of art in the restricted areas ("the miles and miles of corridor space") and in the public areas for the benefit of the "foreign tourists that come in."

I believe the collection is without peer, which makes the issue of public access even more significant. Public access has reduced over 35 years: the number of works in the public areas (the first floor of the Foyer) has declined and public exhibitions have been sporadic, particularly in later years. Tours into the restricted areas have been infrequent and expensive ($220 per person for the signature tour). There is only a small public area in which to mount exhibitions, even if that program were reinvigorated. And because Canberra is relatively remote for most of the Australian population, a full catalogue containing images would be useful.

However, signs are encouraging. Department of Parliamentary Services has been more co-operative in responding to my requests for information, and the parliamentary website's *Listing* is helpful. An increased number of images of works held in the collection have been published on the Parliament's website.[174] As for a full catalogue, the Department has informed me in this manner:

> The Department of Parliamentary Services has been working to digitise all the collections for which it is responsible. However, copyright in works of art must be cleared before images of the works can be published. Accordingly, it has not been determined whether a full catalogue of the rotational art collection will be available online.[175]

I understand this to mean that even if copyright can be cleared that it is not certain a full catalogue will arise. My sense is that the presiding officers still jealously guard the collection. This is a manifestation of Churcher's idea that as a corporate collection it is a perquisite reserved for those who work in the building. A counterargument is that the collection should be made public because it was paid for with public monies. There is considerable force to this argument.

I can think of a novel solution to the copyright problem, grounded in the obvious point that the parliamentarians make the laws. That is, amend the Copyright Regulations, which can be done by the Executive Council—essentially the responsible minister—to provide publication of images of the works of art in a catalogue to be a permissible use. This could possibly be done within the existing "key cultural institution" provisions.

Finally, if asked, I would reframe the acquisition policy as follows:

> **The presiding officers are bound by the following terms:**
>
> 1. Works in the Rotational Collection are equally intended to enhance the public areas and working surroundings in the suites of members of Parliament and in the circulation areas of the building.
>
> 2. The Rotational Collection shall comprise works that are stimulating, without being overwhelmingly provocative.
>
> 3. Works included in the Rotational Collection should be about ideas broadly understood, and express the diversity of the cultures, characters, and identities of Australia, particularly Indigenous Australians.
>
> 4. Works acquired should generally be by Australian artists or artists who are resident in Australia.
>
> 5. In considering acquisitions of works for the Rotational Collection, works must be acquired at the "first point of sale" unless there are compelling reasons otherwise and must have been created not more than 10 years ago.

I commend this policy to the Parliament!

Appendix 1

Table 1. Empirical data by year for the Rotational Collection

Year	Expenditure/ (Allocation)	Prime Minster	Senate President	House Speaker	Curator
1989	(unknown)	Bob Hawke	Kerry Sibraa (Labor, since 1987)[176]	Leo McLeay (Labor, from Aug 1989)[177]	Katrina Rumley, then Janene Pellarin
1990	(unknown)				
1991	(unknown)	Paul Keating (Labor, from Dec 1991)			Peter Haynes
1992	(unknown)				
1993	(unknown)			Stephen Martin (Labor, from May 1993)	
1993–94	$100,000		Michael Beahan (Labor, from Feb 1994)		
1994–95	$166,885				Deborah Hart
1995–96	$93,600	John Howard (Liberal, from Mar 1996)		Robert Halverson (Liberal, from Apr 1996)	
1996–97	(unknown)		Margaret Reid (Liberal, from Aug 1996)		Marc Bayly (acting)
1997–98	(unknown)			Ian Sinclair (National, from Mar 1998)	Louise Dauth
1998–99	(unknown)			Neil Andrew (Liberal, from Oct 1998)	
1999–2000	(unknown)				
2000–01	$5,265				
2001–02	($100,000)				
2002–03	($100,000)		Paul Calvert (Liberal, from Aug 2002)		
2003–04	0				
2004–05	0			David Hawker (Liberal, from Nov 2004)	
2005–06	0				
2006–07	0		Alan Ferguson (Liberal, from Aug 2007)		
2007–08	$271,382	Kevin Rudd (Labor, from Dec 2007)		Harry Jenkins (Labor, from Feb 2008)	Kylie Scroope
2008–09	$411,130		John Hogg (Labor, from Aug 2008)		

Year	Expenditure/ (Allocation)	Prime Minster	Senate President	House Speaker	Curator
2009–10	$346,149	Julia Gillard (Labor, from Jun 2010)			
2010–11	$323,830				
2011–12	$300,709			Peter Slipper (Independent, from Nov 2011)	
2012–13	$284,715	Kevin Rudd (Labor, from June 2013)		Anna Burke (Labor, from Oct 2012)	
2013–14	$237,590	Tony Abbott (Liberal, from Sep 2013)		Bronwyn Bishop (Liberal, from Nov 2013)	Justine van Mourik
2014–15	$127,548		Stephen Parry (Liberal, from Jul 2014)		
2015–16	$470,191	Malcolm Turnbull (Liberal, from Sep 2015)		Tony Smith (Liberal, from Aug 2015)	
2016–17	(unknown)				
2017–18	$40,000–$80,000[178]		Scott Ryan (Liberal, from Nov 21017)		
2018–19	(unknown)	Scott Morrison (Liberal, from Aug 2018)			
2019–20	(unknown)				Kylie Roth (acting)
2020–21	(unknown)				Apolline Kohen
2021–22	(unknown)	Anthony Albanese (Labor, from May 2022)	Slade Brockman (Liberal, from October 2021)	Andrew Wallace (Liberal, from October 2021)	
2022–23	(unknown)		Sue Lines (Labor, from July 2022)	Milton Dick (Labor, from July 2022)	
2023–24	(unknown)				Penelope Grist
2024–25	145,000[179]				

"Year" expressed as a range means the period of 1 July to 30 June of the following year.

Appendix 2

Ross Cameron's speech in the House of Representatives attacking Senate President Michael Beahan, and Beahan's reply.

I rise tonight to raise some concerns about the content of the Parliament House art collection and some wider matters of democratic principle. Members will be familiar with the fable of the emperor's new clothes; a story about a very proud and conceited emperor who was persuaded by a passing charlatan to wear a suit made of a fabric of such lightness, of such elegance of design, of such innovation that it was fit only for the emperor. The emperor's blinding vanity was such that he ordered that he be paraded through the city wearing the suit, much to the pleasure and mirth of his sycophantic subjects, who continued to pour forth praise for the emperor until a young boy on the side of the road looked up with some shock and exclaimed, "The emperor is naked."

I regret that the fable provides a fitting background to the work of Senator Michael Beahan in his capacity as Chairman of the Parliamentary Art Advisory Committee. The President has largely directed the acquisitions policy of the parliament in recent years.

This week the President launched an exhibition of recent acquisitions entitled 'Imagining the Real.' There are works of some obvious ability and interest in the exhibition, but I note the President's comments in opening the exhibition that many of those viewing the works were concerned the works had been hung upside down. The President suggested this was actually a virtue because it required observers "to get closer to the works." I suggest that the President's comments and general approach in this area would eminently qualify him for a place among the emperor's court of advisers.

My immediate interest arises out of my experience this week in viewing the contents of the collection preparatory to receiving my allocation of three works. Ms Robyn Barker provided a photo-slide tour of the collection. I have to say that Ms Barker is the picture of courtesy and efficiency. In order to save time, she asked me what particular genre I was interested in. I explained that I preferred something uplifting, ideally something that evidenced skills in drafting, good use of colour and light—something perhaps that was evocative of the beauty of the Australian landscape or of my electorate of Parramatta. I could see by the look on Ms Barker's face that my prospects were not good. She kindly and gently explained to this philistine from Parramatta that the Parliament's collection was primarily a 'modernist' collection. This word 'modern' is an interesting one. It was the subject of specific consideration by Mr Giles Auty, art critic for *The Spectator*, in his lecture to the New South Wales Gallery of Art in 1994 entitled, "The Meaning of Modern". Mr Auty spoke of modern art as being about attitude rather than quality. He spoke of the 'great divorce' which now exists between the intelligent public and the art they find displayed in most of our public institutions. He suggested that 'we have created a machine which is totally out of control and which is responsible to nobody.' Mr Auty was not criticising modern art per se but arguing against the systematic discrimination against anything vaguely traditional.

The theme was taken up by Mr Terence Maloon, curator, art critic and educator, in an article for *Look* magazine:

> To put the problem into a manageable perspective, we must surely agree that the vast majority of contemporary art is simply beneath consideration. It is bad, it is kitsch, it is irrelevant [...] To make matters even more exasperating, the weirder fringes of contemporary art appear to have the sanction of officialdom which

> have taken up the role of promoting and legitimising particular tendencies, championing a few artists while seeming to ignore alternatives.[180]

Ms Barker explained that all the works with anything approaching the character I described had been snapped up by the ministers and members of greater seniority than me, a humble backbencher. Mr Speaker, I feel some sympathy for my colleague the member for Lowe (Mr Zammit). I suspect that by the time his turn comes he will be offered a piece of ornamental driftwood and some household refuse. My concerns, I know, are shared by other members. I would like to conclude by reading some extracts from a letter to the President from Dr Bob Woods, who says:

> I have just sat through a viewing of some 400 so-called works of art that was organised by the Parliament House art collection. I would have thought that a balanced collection was crucial for the national Parliament. Instead, we have a collection almost entirely weighted towards the avant-garde. I think it accurate to say that there was not a single landscape painting and not one I would have been prepared to hang on my walls.
>
> The young artist of Parramatta whose magnificent exhibition I recently opened would have no chance whatever of getting a painting hung in this gallery because it would not conform to the strict, elitist and completely arbitrary criteria of those selecting the artworks of this parliament. *(Time expired)*[181]

Michael Beahan's Statement in reply:

> **The PRESIDENT**—With the leave of the Senate, I wish to incorporate in *Hansard* a short statement which is in response to the comments made by Mr Ross Cameron, the new member for Parramatta, during the adjournment debate in the other place on Thursday, 20 June. I am sorry that my statement has been circulated fairly late. The honourable member's comments were highly critical of the Parliament House art collection and of my role in promoting its development. I have not got any other time to incorporate this statement, so I would like to do it now in the interests of the speed of business.
>
> Leave granted.
>
> *The statement read as follows—*
>
> **RESPONSE TO MR ROSS CAMERON MP**
>
> I rise to respond to the comments made by Mr Ross Cameron, the new member for Parramatta, during the adjournment debate in the other place on Thursday 20 June. His comments were highly critical of the Parliament House Art Collection and of my role in promoting its development.
>
> Mr Cameron's dissatisfaction with the collection appears to stem from the art shown to him recently when he was selecting works for his office. He apparently feels, based on this viewing, that the art collection "systematically discriminates against anything vaguely traditional" which would not be included in the collection because they "would not conform to the strict, elitist and completely arbitrary criteria of those selecting the artworks of this Parliament."
>
> Unfortunately, the member for Parramatta's comments are not based on the overall balance of the collection. What he saw were the works of art remaining after all of the many, much more senior, Senators and Members before him had made their selections. Perhaps when he has been in Parliament a little longer he may find the selection available to him more to his liking. I am advised that the Member for Parramatta has now decorated his office with the portraits of former Governors-General.
>
> As far as I can tell, Mr Cameron is worried that the collection

contains many abstract works of art. In his comments Mr Cameron approvingly quoted from an earlier letter to me from Senator Woods who said that "we have a collection almost entirely devoted to the avant-garde." But this is mistaken. The avant-garde in any field refers to works that are in the vanguard of recent developments. Abstract art has been made for most of this century and is an established style, regarded as deeply conservative by the practitioners of the more radical forms of conceptual, installation and performance art, none of which are represented in Parliament House.

The member for Parramatta appears to be ignorant of the background to the collection so I will briefly outline it here. The Art Advisory Committee of the Parliament House Construction Authority was the only advisory committee set up by the Authority and included some of the most senior and expert members of the Australian visual arts community as well as parliamentarians. The Authority reported in detail to the Joint Standing Committee on the New Parliament House which established a subcommittee to allow closer parliamentary scrutiny of the art program. The Joint Standing Committee approved not only the direction of the collection but also much of its detail. The original budget for works of art for the offices of Senators and Members was however much reduced as a result of budget cuts in 1986 and this resulted in a reduced collection which lacked some of the intended range and balance.

The collection was, and is, intended to complement and evolve organically from the building's form, function and symbolism, rather than being added as a decorative dressing. In the words of Aldo Giurgola, the Senior Design Architect for Parliament House:

> Just as the building is intended to express strong convictions while remaining flexible as a workplace over the coming years, so also is the art program intentionally formulated to provide a clear sense of order and direction while nevertheless allowing for the varying points of view, styles, and accretion of works which will occur throughout the country's future.

Mr Cameron also sought to articulate his position by quoting general comments by two arts writers. Neither of them discussed particular works of art to illustrate their cases. Had they done so Mr Cameron would have found that art critic Giles Auty approves of many artists in the collection which Mr Cameron would find 'beyond the pale,' including Clifford Possum, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Joy Hester, Godfrey Miller and Roger Kemp.

The second writer Mr Cameron quoted was Terence Maloon, senior education officer at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and recently a member of the Visual Arts/Craft Board of the Australia Council. The article from which Mr Cameron quoted was actually written in defence of contemporary art. In the article he plays the devils' advocate, setting out the popular case against contemporary art (the parts quoted by Mr Cameron) and then providing a considered rebuttal.

Terence Maloon makes the obvious point that of the great variety of art being made, a considerable quantity will be of poor quality. The difficulty he sees for many people is that they are unable to separate the good from the bad and resent the idea that others can, preferring to dismiss the whole endeavour instead of learning to discriminate for themselves. Some people seem to believe that of all areas of human endeavour, only the products of visual artists must be accessible to all people without effort. It's like insisting that all English literature is rubbish because you can't read English.

As the member for Parramatta notes I reinstituted the acquisition program in early 1995. I did so because the 1986 cut had left the collection unbalanced and too small, but the responsibility for approving particular works rests with an art advisory committee to which a consultant curator recommends individual works. The advisory committee, which I Chair, is composed of the Presiding Officers and two members of the

Joint House Committee. We provide parliamentary scrutiny and represent the collection's main client group as well as what might be called non-expert taste. Four other members of the Committee are expert members, including the senior curator of Australian art from the National Gallery; a senior member of the Visual Arts/Craft Board; the partner in Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp Architects who co-conceived of the collection and co-ordinated its development in the 1980s; and a younger practising artist.

The acquisitions policy is far from being strict, elitist or arbitrary. It is instead designed to be fairly open so as to encompass the best of the work being made at any time. In this way the recent acquisitions for the collection reflect the return of figuration as a dominant style after the predominance of abstraction during the 1980s. Some of our criteria are that works speak with a clear and fresh voice; are of high quality; represent the multiplicity of visions in Australia; and ensure an evolving contemporaneity in the collection. How effectively these criteria are being applied I leave to you all to decide when viewing the exhibition.

Obviously not all of the works acquired will be to the taste of individual Members and Senators, but even Mr Cameron conceded that "there are some works of obvious ability and interest" in the current exhibition of new acquisitions. I would be the first to agree. Indeed, there is vigorous competition among some members and Senators to snap up the works in the exhibition. For example, the painting by Lin Onus he referred to in his comments usually hangs in the office of the Deputy Prime Minister [Tim Fisher]; an individual who few of us would accuse of having radical or pretentious tastes.

The business of the Parliament is to provide for the interests of all Australians in coming to terms with the challenges of contemporary life and to shape our common future. This is not a place for relaxation and basking in the reflected glory of past achievement. By trying to select the best work of the emerging and established artists of our time we are bring into this building their perspectives on Australian society. As in all endeavours, our success will be gauged by those generations who follow us. We are building a collection for the future not one that mimics the past.[182]

Appendix 3

Below is the current Rotational Collection Acquisition Policy, which has been in place since 2007.

Parliament House Art Collection Rotational Collection Acquisition Policy

General principles

1 The purpose of the Rotational Collection is to contribute to the environment in which the governance of our nation is considered. Its location in Parliament House, and its relationship and interaction with that building, is of major significance to the nature and contents of the collection. The collection is also intended to reflect national cultural achievements.

2 Works in the Rotational Collection are particularly intended to enhance working surroundings in the suites of members of Parliament and in the circulation areas of the building. The collection should therefore include works with which members can personally identify.

3 The Rotational Collection should reflect the strength and diversity of Australian art and craft. While works in the collection should be stimulating, they should be suitable for general viewing.

4 The general principle for acquisitions is that works should be by artists of appropriate professional standing, and should be suitable to be added to the Rotational Collection. Specific criteria for identifying suitable works are set out below.

Nature of works that may be acquired

5 Works included in the Rotational Collection should:

(a) be about ideas, or reflect aspects of Australian life, landscape or our pluralist society; and

(b) embody and evoke aspiration, inspiration or contemplation; and

(c) reflect the Parliament's form, function, and symbolism, rather than being added as decorative dressing; and

(d) be of a stature and standing to complement the dignity of the building; and

(e) support, enhance, and enliven the environment of the workers in and visitors to the building, and their experience of the building; and

(f) contribute to an understanding of Australian culture, character, and identity, through the range and diversity of styles collected; and

(g) contribute to the slow and deliberate fusion of spaces, materials and surfaces of an environment in which all elements are intended to build a unified symbol of Australia's premium building; and

(h) through their quality, responsiveness, vitality and diversity, be analogous to the ideals of the Parliament and the community.

Condition etc of works that may be acquired

6 A work may only be acquired for the Rotational Collection if it:

(a) is of an acceptable professional standard;

(b) is in good condition, and requires no more than minor conservation;

(c) is able to be properly mounted, displayed and conserved; and

(d) is of a scale, subject matter and character appropriate to the function of Parliament House.

7 The Rotational Collection should where practicable contain work representing all major media forms.

Artists whose works may be acquired

8 Works acquired should generally be by artists who have a professional track record.

9 Works acquired should generally be by:

(a) Australian artists; or

(b) artists who are resident in Australia, have been resident in Australia for significant periods of their creative life, and have contributed to Australian cultural life.

10 Works acquired should contribute to making the Rotational Collection comprehensive and balanced in terms of:

(a) gender; and
(b) geographical representation; and
(c) expressing the diversity of the cultures, characters, and identities of Australia.

11 In considering whether works to be acquired contribute to making the Rotational Collection comprehensive and balanced in terms of geographical representation, regard should be had to:

(a) where the artist is currently based (noting the population concentration of artists in major urban centres); and
(b) the artist's birthplace; and
(c) where the artist was educated.

12 To ensure that the Rotational Collection is comprehensive and balanced as mentioned in paragraph 10, and addresses areas of visual art practice that are particularly dynamic and important, the Art Advisory Committee may from time to time identify priority collecting areas.

Source of works

13 In considering acquisitions of works for the Rotational Collection, it should be recognised that acquiring works at "first point of sale" provides a positive contribution to the livelihood of Australia's arts community.

14 A gift of a work of art to the Rotational Collection will not normally be accepted:

(a) if the work does not satisfy the other requirements of this policy for the acquisition of works for the Rotational Collection; or
(b) if the gift would initiate the artist's representation in the Rotational Collection.

Notes

1 Subsection 6(1) of the *Parliamentary Precincts Act 1988*.

2 Parliament of Australia. "Historic Memorials Collection Catalogue," https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/06_Visit_Parliament/Parl_House_Art_Collection/Stories_and_histories/Historic_Memorials_Catalogue.pdf.

3 M. Pamille Berg, *Interwoven: The commissioned art and craft for Parliament House* (Canberra: Department of Parliamentary Services, 2013).

4 Parliament of Australia, "Listing of artworks in the Parliament House Rotational Collection," https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/06_Visit_Parliament/Parl_House_Art_Collection/About/Parliament_House_Rotational_Art_Collection_catalogue_listing.pdf.

5 Lisa Thomas official email to author of 5 June 2026.

6 John Carrick and Katrina Rumley, *Expressing Australia, Art in Parliament House* (Canberra: Joint House Department, 1993).

7 Parliament House Construction Authority, "Project Parliament: News from the Parliament House Construction Authority," issue 8, 1987.

8 Katrina Rumley. "There are better Whiteleys": Selecting works for Australia's premier public building, 1983-88, (Katrina Rumley Bingil Bay, Qld: 2024). NLA catalogue download access at https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/10025528.

9 Julian Faigan, "Artworks Collection Parliament House Canberra, Report on management and staffing options," Joint House Department, Parliament of Australia, November 1990; Betty Churcher, "Review of the Parliament House Art Collection", Report to the Presiding Officers of the Parliament of Australia, October 2003, Parliamentary Library; Louise Dauth, "Parliament House Art Collection, Background paper", Joint House Department, November 2001, released in redacted form by DPS; Lousie Dauth, "Parliament House Art Collection, Background paper", Department of Parliamentary Services. January 2006, released in redacted form by DPS; Philippa Lean, "Parliament House Art and Craft: Rotational Collection 21 years on, history, purpose, guidelines and the future", May 2009, Parliamentary Library; Roslyn Russell and Louise Douglas, "Parliament House Art Collection Review", Unpublished report to Department of Parliamentary Services, 14 August 2013.

10 Faigan, "Report," 14.

11 *Parliament House Construction Authority Act 1979*.

12 Joint Standing Committee on the New Parliament House, "Report: The developed design of the New Parliament House," Parliamentary Paper No. 388/1986, November 1986, v, https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-1663729554/view?partId=nla.obj-1664065823.

13 PHCA, "Project Parliament," 8.

14 PHCA, "Project Parliament," 39.

15 PHCA, "Project Parliament," 39.

16 Draft Agreement between PHCA and MGT dated 1983, NAA: A8094, 83/6230.

17 PHCA, "Project Parliament," 135.

18 Biographer Sheridan Palmer says of his manner: "Burke skilfully handled the press, businessmen, bishops and committees with eloquent mastery. He worked smoothly between conservatives and socialists, intellectuals and the common man." Sheridan Palmer, "Burke, Sir Joseph Terence (1913–1992)", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of

Biography, Australian National University, https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/burke-sir-joseph-terence-16323/text28277, published online 2016. Another biographical treatment is Jaynie Anderson, "Interrogating Joe Burke and His Legacy" *Journal of Art Historiography* 4 (2011): 1–.

19 According to Anne Gray, establishment of ANG's large-scale collection of contemporary Australian art ran over the period 1973–1988, overlapping with the AAC's acquisition of the same genre. This notably included works by Rosalie Gascoigne, Fiona Hall, Robert MacPherson, Gunter Christmann, Michael Taylor, Dick Watkins, Ken Whisson, Micky Allen, Bill Henson, Grant Mudford, and Wesley Stacey, whose work also was acquired for Parliament. In a real sense, ANG and the Art Program at Parliament were competing for the same art. Anne Gray, "Truly National," in *Building the Collection,* ed. Pauline Green (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2003), 92.

20 Paul Genney, "Carl Andrew (3 July 1939 – 18 February 2019)", *The Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia*, 28, no.2. (June 2019): 26, https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/211993/1/01_Kent_Traditions_of_Dissent%253A_2019.pdf.

21 Dobie stated this about himself during his valedictory speech: "By far the most enjoyable task I have had while a member was being my party's representative on the New Parliament House Arts Advisory Committee. This was so stimulating and so enjoyable that it had to be regarded as obscene. But it was a great thing." Don Dobie, "Special adjournment," Parliament of Australia, House Hansard, Friday, 1 December 1995, Page: 4367, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansardr%2F1995-12-01%2F0043%22.

22 Architect Rory Spence explains Giurgola's approach as following: "... the principle that arts and craft have the same creative basis as architecture and the work should develop together in a dialectic manner, rather than art being purchased at the last minute when the building is nearly complete. Parliament House is a major experiment in the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*." *Gesamtkunstwerk* points to the idea of a conjunction of utility and aesthetic pleasure, a seamless experience of art, site, and space. Rory Spence, "The New Australian Parliament House," *The Architectural Review* CLXXXIV, no. 1100 (October 1988): 47.

23 PHCA, "Project Parliament," 135.

24 Parliament House Construction Authority, "Notes of Meeting of 12 November 1981...", NAA: A8094, 82/5732.

25 Parliament House Construction Authority, "Notes of Meeting of 4 February 1982...", NAA: A8094, 82/5732.

26 Parliament House Construction Authority, "Notes of Meeting of 18 February 1982...", NAA: A8094, 82/5732.

27 Parliament House Construction Authority, "Notes of Meeting of 26 February 1982...", NAA: A8094, 82/5732.

28 Romaldo Giurgola, "Reflections on the Parliament House and an Australian National Spirit," 8 April 1982, NAA: A8094, 82/5732. For the meeting item see Art Advisory Committee, "Agenda," NAA: A8094, 82/5732.

29 Giurgola, "Reflections," 18.

30 Giurgola, "Reflections," 4.

31 Giurgola, "Reflections," 5.

32 Giurgola, "Reflections," 17–18.

33 Joseph Burke, "Suggestions for the Acquisition of Works for Parliament House," c. 18 May 1982, NAA: A8094, 82/5510 PT1.

34 Art Advisory Committee, “Report to the Parliament House Authority,” September 1982, 2–3, NAA: A8094, 83/6230.

35 Giurgola, “Reflections,” 8.

36 AAC, “Report,” September 1982, 5.

37 AAC “Report,” September 1982, 9.

38 Joseph Burke, “Some observations on the Interim Report on the Art Program,” 26 September 1983, NAA: A8094, 83/6230.

39 Romaldo Giurgola, “The conceptual basis of the Art Program for New Parliament House,” Mitchell/Giurgola & Thorp Architects, 28 September 1983, NAA: A8094, 83/6230.

40 Art Advisory Committee, “Report of the Joint Standing Committee’s decisions on the Art Program,” 18 October 1984, NAA: A8094, 83/6229 PT1.

41 Recorded subsequently in: Parliament House Construction Authority, “Background Paper on Art Program,” 26 July 1985, NAA: M2731, 120 Part 1.

42 JSC, “Developed design,” 43.

43 Joseph Burke, “Suggestions for the Acquisition of Works for Parliament House”, c. 18 May 1982, NAA: A8094, 82/5510 PT1, 5–6.

44 Katrina Rumley and Pam Berg, “Preliminary Proposal for the New Parliament House Collection for Parliamentary Suites”, 25 July 1984, 9, NAA: A8094, 82/5892 PT6.

45 Rumley and Berg, “Suites”, 6.

46 Rumley and Berg, “Suites”, 2.

47 Rumley and Berg, “Suites”, 4.

48 Rumley and Berg, “Suites”, 3–4.

49 Romaldo Giurgola, “Reflections on the Parliament House and an Australian National Spirit”, 2013 (edited version). In Berg, *Interwoven*, 20-22.

50 Iain Fowler, “Statement on New Parliament House,” February 1983, NAA: A8094, 82/5892 PT2.

51 Art Advisory Committee, “Duties of Curator,” c. February 1983, NAA: A8094, 82/5892 PT2.

52 Art Advisory Committee, “Minutes of Meeting,” 11 February 1983, NAA: A8094, 82/5892 PT2.

53 Pamille Berg, “Notes concerning the Lloyd Rees paintings on reserve at Macquarie Galleries,” Memorandum to Art Advisory Committee, 6 April 1983, NAA: A8094, 82/5892 PT3.

54 Romaldo Giurgola, letter to Iain Fowler, 17 April 1984, NAA: A8094, 83/6230.

55 Pamille Berg letter to Katrina Rumley, 18 February 1984, NAA: A8094, 83/6230.

56 Art Advisory Committee, “Minutes of AAC Meeting held 16 November 1984” (extract), NAA: A8094, 83/6230.

57 Works by Tony Hanning, Lenton Parr, Victoria Howlett, Chris Sanders, Ann Geroe, and three simply indicated as “aboriginal”: Art Advisory Committee, “Postscript to AAC minutes, meeting no. 22”, NAA: A8094, 82/5892 PT7.

58 Art Advisory Committee, "Parliamentarians' Suites Collection & Proposed Acquisitions for Other Areas of the Building," Art Advisory Committee meeting 23, 31 January 1985, item 3, NAA: A8094, 82/5892 PT7.

59 Katrina Rumley, "John Brack Painting – 'No' 1984, Submission for Purchase", 9 August 1984, located in Australian National Gallery, "Artworks for New Parliament House", ANG file no, 84/662.

60 Pamille Berg, "Comments on proposed acquisition of painting by John Brack: 'No'", 14 August 1984, ANG file no. 84/662.

61 Katrina Rumley and Pam Berg, "Preliminary Proposal for the New Parliament House Collection for Parliamentary Suites," 25 July 1984, 9, NAA: A8094, 82/5892 PT6.

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63 Rumley and Berg, "Suites," 2.

64 Rumley and Berg, "Suites," 4.

65 Art Advisory Committee, "Acquisitions by Purchase," c. 1985, (annotated by hand (probably Rumley)) as "Policy", NAA: A8094, 83/6230.

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69 Art Advisory Committee, "Attachment to the Minutes of the 28th AAC meeting on 2August 1985", NAA: A8074, 82/5892 PT9.

70 Art Advisory Committee, "Acquisitions as at 18/02/86", NAA: A8094, 82/5892 PT10.

71 Parliament of Australia, Senate Estimates Committee E, 20 October 1988, Department of Administrative Services, Program 18 – Parliament House Construction Authority, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22committees%2Festimate%2Fecomd8810120a_ece.out%2F0008%22.

72 Parliament of Australia, "In Committee," Senate Hansard, Tuesday, 29 November 1988 Page: 3131, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansards%2F1988-11-29%2F0057%22.

73 Parliament of Australia, "Report, Joint House Department," Senate Hansard, Thursday, 1 December 1988, page: 3309, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansards%2F1988-12-01%2F0082%22.

74 Clyde Holding, letter to Alex Morokoff, 15 April 1986, NAA: A8094, 83/6227.

75 Alex Morokoff, letter to Clyde Holding, 27 June 1986, NAA: A8094, 83/6227.

76 Parliament House Construction Authority, "Minutes of Meeting held 3 February 1987", NAA: A8094, 83/5956 PT1.

77 Iain Fowler letter to Mike Bolton, 23 December 1988, NAA: A8094, 88/9216 PT3.

78 John Moses, "The Glories of Fyshwick," *The Australian*, 6–7 December 1986, suppl. 10.

79 Loane, "Nudes, prudes and lipstick in Kings Hall," 13.

80 Daniel Thomas, "Art in New Parliament House," *Australian and International Art Monthly* 12, (July 1998): 1.

81 Giurgola, "Reflections," 28.

82 Carl Andrew, "The Arts and Crafts of Parliament House," in *Parliament House Canberra: A building for the nation,* ed. Haig Beck, (Sydney: William Collins, 1988), 41.

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84 John Carroll, "New Parliament House: The monument to 1988", *Quadrant*, 34, no. 3 (March 1989): 34.

85 Carroll, "New Parliament House," 35.

86 Janene Pellarin, "Of the people, for the people, by the people: Collaborative design at new Parliament House," *Design World* 16, (1989): 37.

87 Janene Pellarin, "Art and Architecture: The gap between theory and practice in the new Parliament," *Craft Realities: Essays on objects, makers, users and society*: 3, (1990): n.p.

88 Sylvia Kleinert, "Myths for the future: the art of Parliament House," *Transition* 30 (Spring 1989): 11.l

89 Parliament House Construction Authority, "Project Parliament: News from the Parliament House Authority," issue 8, 1987, 155.

90 Julian Faigan, "Artworks Collection Parliament House Canberra, Report on management and staffing options," Joint House Department, Parliament of Australia, November 1990, 32.

91 Janene Pellarin, "Art and Architecture: The gap between theory and practice in the new Parliament," *Craft Realities: Essays on objects, makers, users and society*: 3, (1990): n.p

92 Pellarin, "Art & Architecture," n.p.

93 Faigan, "Report," 74.

94 Faigan, "Report," 1.

95 Faigan, "Report," 20.

96 Faigan, "Report," 14.

97 Faigan, "Report," 18.

98 Faigan, "Report," 19.

99 Faigan, "Report," 45.

100 Michael Bolton, Joint House Department, "Artworks Management - paper to Presiding Officers," 8 May 1991, NAA: A7646, 91/732.

101 The artists (with number of works) were: Robert Boyens (3), Janet Dawson (2), Janenne Eaton (1), George Foxhill (2), Rosalie Gascoigne (2), Basil Hall (1), Richard Larter (2), Mandy Martin (4), Jörg Schmeisser (3),Ben Taylor (2), Michael Taylor (2), and Robin Wallace-Crabbe (3).

[102] Peter Haynes, "Artists from Canberra and Districts in the Parliament House Art Collection," ex. cat., 1992, n.p.

[103] Peter Haynes, "Landscape Art from the Parliament House Art Collection," ex. cat., 1992, n.p.

[104] Artists included: Clarice Beckett, Lorna Chick, Grace Cossington Smith, Peggy Poulson Naparulla (Walpiri), Ray Arnold, Henri Bastin, Mac Betts, Sam Byrne, Philip Gudthaykudthay (Liyagarawumirri), Geoffrey Miller, John Perceval, David Rankin, Imants Tillers, David van Nunen, and Ken Whisson.

[105] Peter Haynes, "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art," ex. cat., 1993.

[106] Peter Haynes, "Images of Work and Leisure," ex. cat., 1994, n.p.

[107] The artists shown were: Judith Alexandrovics, Charles Blackman, Floorje Costain, Noel Counihan, Alan Cruickshank, Roy Dalgarno, Max Dupain, Jesse Jewhurst Hilder, Gil Jamieson, Peter Kingston, Jim Marwood, David Moore, Jeffrey Smart, Alan Sumner, Joseph Tierney, Vicki Varvaressos, Phyl Waterhouse, Bryan Westwood, and James Willebrant.

[108] Peter Haynes, "Abstract Art," ex. cat., 1994, n.p.

[109] The artists exhibited were Robert Jacks, Michael Johnson, Anne Judell, Roger Kemp, Alun Leech-Jones, Robert MacPherson, Godfrey Miller, Alan Mitelman John Peart, and Dick Watkins.

[110] Peter Haynes, "Sculpture," ex. cat., 1995, n.p. The artists whose work was exhibited (thirty-eight items) were Jan Brown, Marc Clark, Jock Clutterbuck, Peter D. Cole, Augustine Dall'Ava, Erwin Fabian, Bert Flugelman, Rosalie Gascoigne, Marea Gazzard, Bev Hogg, Vincas Jomanatas, Stephen Killick, Inga King, Robert Klippel, Les Kossatz, Rosemary Madigan, Hilarie Mais, Clement Meadmore, Robert J. Morris, Robert Parr, Anthony Pryor, Ron Robertson-Swan, Judy Silver, and Peter Taylor.

[111] Michael Beahan interviewed by Norman Abjorensen, 2 February 2006, NLA call no. ORAL TRC 5596, file no, nla.oh-5596-0000-0004-12_nla.obj-209011159_Michael_Beahan_i.mp3, 24':15"–26':32".

[112] Lean, at 53, cites Katrina Rumley, "Proposal for an Art Acquisition Fund" and Katrina Rumley, "Proposal for an Art Advisory Committee", included with a letter from Rumley to Michael Bolton, Secretary, Joint House Department, 20 April 1989.

[113] Philippa Lean, "Parliament House Art and Craft: Rotational Collection 21 years on, history, purpose, guidelines and the future", May 2009, Parliamentary Library, 31.

[114] Philippa Lean was at the time a student at ANU and wrote the report as a part of an internship. Lean's report is an internal government document but drew on records not otherwise publicly available.

[115] Lean, "Report" 29–30.

[116] Betty Churcher, "Review of the Parliament House Art Collection", Report to the Presiding Officers of the Parliament of Australia, October 2003, Parliamentary Library, 11.

[117] Deborah Hart, "Place and Perception: New acquisitions, Parliament House Art Collection," ex. cat., 1995, n.p.

[118] Parliament of Australia, *Creative Nation, Commonwealth cultural policy* (Canberra: Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994), 1.

[119] Parliament, *Creative Nation*, 6.

[120] Hart, "Place and Perception," n.p.

[121] Deborah Hart, "Imagining the Real: An exhibition of recent acquisitions from the Parliament House Art Collection," 1996, n.p.

[122] The artists were: Ian Abdulla (1991), Crispin Ackerman (five from 1995), Gordon Bennett (1995), Lynn Boyd (1994), Jon Cattapan (1995), Robert Foster (two from 1995), Bill Hay (1995), David Keeling (1995), Kerrie Leishman (1995), Jacky Maranbarra (1993), Lin Onus (1995), Ronnie Tjampatjinpa (1994), Vivienne Shark Le Witt (1994), Tim Maguire (1995), Motor Car Jim (1994), Stephen Nothling (1995), Gloria Petyarre (two from 1995), Rosslyn Piggott (1994), Garry Shead (six from 1994), and Sally Smart (1995).

[123] Ross Cameron, Parliament of Australia, Hansard, Adjournment Motion, "Parliament House: Art," 20 June 1996, page: 2469, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansardr%2F1996-06-20%2F0069%22.

[124] Ross Cameron, Parliament of Australia, Hansard, "Supply Bills 1996–97", 23 May 1996, page:1213, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansardr%2F1996-05-23%2F0002%22.

[125] Sasha Grishin, "The Peoples' House of art," *The Canberra Times*, 26 June 1996, 34.

[126] Ross Cameron, Parliament of Australia, Hansard, Procedures Committee, "It's your House: community involvement in the procedures and practices of the House of Representatives," 8 December 1999, page: 13175, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansardr%2F1999-12-08%2F0146%22.

[127] Jane Cadzow, "The Right Thing," *The Sydney Morning Herald (online edition)*, August 14, 2004, https://www.smh.com.au/national/the-right-thing-20130524-2k61g.html.

[128] Louise Dauth, "Parliament House Art Collection, Background paper," November 2001, 3–4, released in redacted form by DPS. The AAC members were: Margaret Reid, President of the Senate, Sue West, Deputy President, Neil Andrew, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Garry Nehl, Deputy Speaker, John McDonald, Head of Australian Art, NGA, Professor David Williams, ANU, Bronwyn Goss, nominee of the Australia Council's Visual Arts Craft Fund, and David Chalker, Bundanon Trust.

[129] Dauth, "Background paper," 4.

[130] Joint House Department, "Dreamings, a Forecourt for a Parliament: An exhibition of works by artists of the Western Desert," ex. cat., March 1997.

[131] Louise Dauth, "Women's Work in the New Parliament House Art Collection: Recent acquisitions," ex. cat., August 1997, n.p.

[132] The full list of works is: Vivienne Binns, *Surfacing in the Pacific*, 1993, Julia Ciccarone, *Fruit of bliss: Hermaphrodite, The Entrance*, 1986, Helen Geier, *Pergola + 4*, 1996, Narelle Jubelin, *Sydney and Vienna*, 1990, Lindy Lee, *Untitled, man with glass eye after Tiziano Vecelli*, 1990, Tracey Moffatt, *Something more no. 1*, 1989 and *Some lads Nos 1–5*, 1986, Susan Norrie, *Island I, I, II*, 1987, Nancy Petyarre, *Body paint*, 1996, Patricia Piccinini, *Psychogeography*, 1996, Jacky Redgate, *The World turns on his thumb*, 1985, Julie Rrap, *Transportation 11*, 1997, and Katarina Vesterberg, *Adder rock*, 1997.

[133] Jason Koutsoukis, "The paintings politicians (don't) like," *Australian Financial Review*, August 9–10, 2003, 29.

[134] Betty Churcher, "Review of the Parliament House Art Collection", Report to the Presiding Officers of the Parliament of Australia, October 2003, Parliamentary Library, 21.

[135] Churcher, "Review," 37.

[136] Churcher, "Review," 13.

[137] Churcher, "Review," 23.

[138] Churcher, "Review," 19.

[139] Churcher, "Review," 13.

[140] Neil Andrew, Parliament of Australia, Hansard, "Parliament House Art Collection," 17 June 2004), page: 30711, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansardr%2F2004-06-17%2F0003%22.

[141] John Faulkner, Parliament of Australia, Hansard, "Parliament House: Art collection," 17 June 2004, page: 24028, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansards%2F2004-06-17%2F0007%22.

[142] Kate Lundy, "Parliament House Art Collection under Threat," Media Statement, 30 March 2004, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id:%22media/pressrel/J14C6%22.

[143] John McDonald, "The Land," *Federation*, ex.cat., December 2000, 36.

[144] John McDonald, "Culture in the Age of Howard," first published May 26, 2004, https://www.johnmcdonald.net.au/2004/culture-in-the-age-of-howard/.

[145] Department of Parliamentary Services, "Annual Report 2003–04", 13.

[146] Department of Parliamentary Services, "Annual Report 2006–07", 124.

[147] Department of Parliamentary Services, "Rotational Collection Acquisition Policy," Operating Policies and Procedures No. 17—Parliament House Art Collection, undated.

[148] Gates says her appointment in fact came about in the final months of the Howard government. Brief biographical details for Gates are provided at Services for Art, "About," 2022, https://www.servicesforart.com/page/about.

[149] Betty Churcher, "Review of the Parliament House Art Collection", Report to the Presiding Officers of the Parliament of Australia, October 2003, Parliamentary Library, 25.

[150] Philippa Lean, "Parliament House Art and Craft: Rotational Collection 21 years on, history, purpose, guidelines and the future", May 2009, Parliamentary Library, 43.

[151] Lean, "Report," 43.

[152] Fleur Anderson, "Art for perks' sake … the pollies' Selection," *The Australian Financial Review*, 19 December 2009, 26.

[153] Roslyn Russell and Louise Douglas, "Parliament House Art Collection Review", Unpublished report to Department of Parliamentary Services, 14 August 2013, 10–11. Russell and Douglas also mention the existence of a document *Operating Policies and Procedures No. 19 – Allocation of artworks to Members of Parliament*, although this document has not been reviewed (at 9).

[154] Russell and Douglas, "Review," 20–21.

[155] Russell and Douglas, "Review," 11.

[156] Art Gallery of New South Wales, "Margaret Olley," accessed 20 March 2023, https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/artists/olley-margaret/.

[157] Justine van Mourik, email to author of 9 May 2023. One is known to be *Limes and green chest, Duxford Street,* c. 1972.

158 Anderson, "Art for perks' sake."

159 Sarah Martin, "'It's a huge job': A peek inside Parliament House's private, prized art stash," *The Guardian* (online), Sunday, 21 July 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/jul/21/its-a-huge-job-a-peek-inside-parliament-houses-private-prized-art-stash.

160 Dylan Anderson, "AFL Stars Immortalised in Wooden Aboriginal Artworks at Parliament House," ABC Radio Canberra, 3 June 2016, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-03/wooden-afl-stars-field-team-at-parliament-house/7476448?utm_campaign=abc_news_web&utm_content=link&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_source=abc_news_web.

161 Department of Parliamentary Services, "Annual Report 2016–17", 88.

162 Department of Parliamentary Services, "Annual Report 2017–18", 148.

163 Supplied by DPS upon request, email of 27 February 2023.

164 DPS, "Annual Report 2020–21", 21.

165 Department of Parliamentary Services, "New acquisitions: contemporary identity and land," wall texts, labels and images, c. May 2021, 2.

166 Justine van Mourik email to author of 22 March 2023.

167 Russell and Douglas, "Report," 11.

168 Parliament of Australia. "Representing the Nation: Australia's Coat of Arms," 13 March 2023. https://web.archive.org/web/20230312203304/https://www.aph.gov.au/Visit_Parliament/Whats_On/Event/Coat_of_Arms.

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170 Betty Churcher, "Review of the Parliament House Art Collection", Report to the Presiding Officers of the Parliament of Australia, October 2003, Parliamentary Library, 18.

171 Parliament of Australia, *Creative Nation, Commonwealth cultural policy* (Canberra: Department of Communications and the Arts, 1994), 6.

172 Matthew Knott, "MP furious over 'appalling' nude art in Parliament House," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 October 2015, 10.

173 Craig Kelly, Parliament of Australia, Hansard, Federation Chamber - Constituency Statements – "Parliament House Art Collection," 15 October 2015, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=chamber/hansardr/3aef5f9d-aa5b-4d1d-98d0-fa5f25d3d3d7/&sid=0187.

174 Parliament of Australia, "Rotational Collection", https://www.aph.gov.au/Visit_Parliament/Art/Collections/Rotational_Collection.

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177 Parliament of Australia, “Speakers of the House of Representatives,” https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives/Biographical_Dictionary/The_Speaker_of_the_House_of_Representatives.

178 Art Services Director Justine van Mourik speaking in 2018 says between 50–100 works are purchased annually at an average price of $8,000. Justine van Mourik, “Welcome to Parliament,” 15 August 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z60BqXEujFs.

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181 Ross Cameron, Parliament of Australia, Hansard, Adjournment Motion, “Parliament House: Art,” 20 June 1996, page: 2469, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansardr%2F1996-06-20%2F0069%22.

182 Michael Beahan, Parliament of Australia, Hansard, “Parliament House Art Collection,” 27 June 1996, page: 2313, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansards%2F1996-06-27%2F0001%22.

Robert Miller, MA, PhD, a retired patent attorney, studied art history at the University of Sydney and completed his doctoral thesis on the Parliament's rotational collection in 2024.

