



# PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 12 1982

## OPENING OF AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL GALLERY

It seems only a short while, Your Majesty, since you were here with us opening the High Court, the companion building of this National Gallery. I hope you will take pleasure in what you will find and see here.

I would like to thank the Council of the Gallery, its present and its former Chairman, for the work they have done preparing for this day.

It was the Government of Sir Robert Menzies, in 1965, that made the decision to establish a national gallery and significant purchasing of works of art for this occasion began in 1969 when substantial funds were first set aside to acquire a national collection.

This is a collection now of very considerable value. Sir Darryl Lindsay and Sir William Dargie were particularly important in making it possible to build up a first-class national collection. I would like to pay a special tribute to James Mollison, present Director of the Gallery, who has devoted 13 years of his life to this moment.

I was able to have a quick preview of the collection not long ago. I believe he should be complimented on the way the collection has been put together and prepared for public presentation. The acquisitions of this Gallery will enable visitors to see major significant works of art of all the major important periods, from nearly every significant school and from every continent.

Australia is represented in all those periods. That in a very real way will allow us to see ourselves, to judge ourselves against the perspective of the background of the wider world. My sister reminds me on those rare occasions when we meet, that art is truly international and for its purpose national boundaries do not really exist. The way this collection has been put together demonstrates that that is so.

Turning to the building itself, I think everyone will agree that its entrance is imposing. Some may judge that from certain angles, it is not the most beautiful building in the world, but when the trees already planted around it grow, the lines of the concrete will soften.

It also needs to be understood that this Gallery has been designed and built for a particular purpose. It has been designed to enable works of art - many of which have a degree of fragility - to be housed in special conditions. It has been designed to allow works of art to be stored, exhibited and protected in an environment that will enable them to be seen by all Australians, and by overseas visitors, for generations to come.

I would also like to make the point, Your Majesty, that this building has been designed so that disabled people in wheelchairs are able to enjoy the building and to share the value of this collection with other Australians. Further measures are being taken to improve still further the facilities for the disabled.

I believe that the architects should be complimented - that the designers, the builders and everyone who has played a part in the creation of this Gallery should be complimented for what they have achieved. This is a young gallery, but it is undoubtedly going to become one of the great galleries in the world.

It would be invidious for me to mention particular artists but I am going to make one exception. I think we all greatly regret that Fred Williams is not with us today. For 10 years he had been a member of the National Gallery Council. Fred Williams was one of the few Australians to have exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art in New York - indeed, he had a solo exhibition there - and he exhibited in most of the world's major art centres, including a further solo exhibition in Paris. That he died a few months before this opening is a matter of great regret, but it is a great pleasure to have here his wife and three daughters.

I have been asked by the Gallery Council to announce tonight that three galleries are to be named after Australian artists in recognition of their outstanding service to the Gallery. One is to be named after Fred Williams, one after Sir William Dargie, and one after Sir Darryl Lindsay.

Your Majesty, Australia is now starting to cast her eyes ahead to 1988 when the Australian Bicentennial is to be celebrated. Much planning is going into the events of that year. This Gallery will then be 5 years old. Its activities will be an important part and it will obviously have a significant role to play in celebrating the Bicentennial.

There is a continuing need for the national collection to be further enhanced. The Gallery Council is now charged with the responsibility of securing corporate and individual donations from all sections of the community to add to the collection. I don't know if they have got a collector around the corner, but I am sure arrangements could be made.

The Government, for its part, is announcing a \$27 million contribution to the Gallery purchases over the next 5 years to be known as the Bicentennial Collection. I hope the corporate and private sectors will follow our example to enable this great Gallery to build upon its present achievements.

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