



PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

1 May 1976

CONFERENCE OF THE REGIONAL GALLERIES ASSOCIATION

The Regional Galleries Association Conference brings together the people most directly concerned with developing and managing Victoria's regional galleries.

The regional galleries of Victoria represent a most significant achievement in community artistic life in Australia. They are important not merely because they are repositories of good examples of Australia art. The active Association and the annual activities of the galleries in mounting exhibitions do much to encourage Australians to a wider appreciation of the quality of art in their own country.

I am of course particularly pleased that this Conference is being held in Hamilton. The Hamilton Art Gallery is probably the best provincial gallery in Australia. The Hamilton gallery's collection of decorative art is, I understand, not only unequalled in Australia, but has many pieces which are of international standard.

The Government in Victoria has of course been very active in the promotion of the arts. The Federal Government has also taken an active role through the Australia Council. The Visual Arts Board of the Council has provided substantial assistance for exhibitions which have toured galleries throughout Australia.

There is to be an increasing emphasis on funds provided through the Australian Gallery Directors Council for exhibitions to regional galleries. The exhibition "Sculpture of Thailand" is to be shown at nine centres throughout Australia including the Victorian Arts Centre in Melbourne and the Mildura Arts Centre.

The Government intends to continue its support for the creative and performing arts in Australia.

Australia has an extraordinarily rich artistic tradition. There is hardly an area of the arts where Australia has not excelled.

Previous Federal Liberal and Country Party Governments took a keen interest in encouraging the creative and performing arts in Australia. They established the Commonwealth Literary Board, the Australian National Gallery, the Arts Council, and they took the first steps in the establishment of the Film Corporation. I am pleased to recall that as Minister I took an active part in establishing the Canberra School of Music.

A Government Parties Committee has now been established under the Chairmanship of David Hamer to assist it in developing the arts in Australia. During the Parliamentary recess this Committee will be visiting all States and meeting with people involved in the arts.

I have been personally concerned that the Government's activities in promoting creative artists endeavour in Australia should remain with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and the committee I have just referred to will be reporting directly to me.

You will all know that the Government is very concerned at the present time that the Federal Government operates within the limits of the resources available to it. We are particularly concerned to eliminate wasteful expenditure. Every area of Government spending is being examined in the enquiry we are presently making. I need hardly say that Government activities in the arts area are under very close examination at present. I do not want to pre-empt the results of that examination - which is still proceeding - by being too specific in my comments today.

It may however help to ease any concern there may be if I re-emphasise the broad purposes of the Government in this area. The Government fully intends to encourage the continued growth and development of the arts in Australia. In particular, it is our intention to encourage the development of Australian art rather than costly purchases overseas. We intend, for example, to give effect to the National Gallery's policy of giving priority to the purchase of Australian arts.

Alongside this policy Australia must of course be open to influence from overseas. Great art inevitably must cross political frontiers. We have announced our intention to support a more vigorous sponsorship of exhibitions which will give Australians ready access to the art and culture of other countries. Australians are and ought to be in the vanguard of the artistic world.

The Government's principal present concern to restore economic prosperity to Australia will not be allowed to obscure the fact Australia is more than an efficient economy. Australia can be a part of a vital world culture and the Government intends to play a part in encouraging this development.

The regional galleries have a most significant role in this exciting prospect, both as repositories of Australian art and as exhibitors of the art of other countries.

3.

The regional galleries of Victoria have already made an important contribution and I have no doubt that this contribution will be even greater in the future.

I have great pleasure in declaring the 19th annual conference of the Regional Galleries Association of Victoria open.

000ooo000