



45

PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

9 MARCH 1977

ADDRESS AT THE OPENING OF THE "GENESIS" EXHIBITION AT THE A.N.U.

It is with much pleasure that I welcome you to this very fine exhibition - Genesis of a Gallery. The exhibition began its Australian wide tour in Adelaide twelve months ago and has visited Darwin, and all State capitals, other than Melbourne, where it may be shown later.

It has been seen and enjoyed by many thousands of people and warmly received by artists and art critics. It illustrates the range and diversity of the national collection which will find its home in the National Gallery.

Creating a National Gallery of Art which will take its place amongst the great galleries of the world is an exciting and challenging task. The decision of this Government to pursue with enthusiasm this long-standing objective is a reflection of the confidence of Australians in their artistic achievements.

The exhibition before you is an important step towards fulfilment of the nation's desire to collect, preserve and exhibit the best of our heritage and to expose it to study by the critical minds of the present and future generations.

For success, the Gallery must of course have these objectives. In the case of our own gallery, as you will see tonight, we are aiming higher. The Gallery is building up a collection which recognises the continuity of the European cultural tradition and in particular, its important influence on Australian art. In addition, the collection includes examples of other traditions, as you will see in those items representing African, Melanesian, Columbian-American, and Asian art.

The collection is an expression of our belief as a nation in ourselves, and our creative spirit. It shows that we are prepared to shape our taste and have our curiosity aroused by setting the achievements of our artists alongside those of other nations and peoples, old and new.

Many of you will perhaps have had the experience in some parts of the world, of visiting galleries which have become mummified museums - of which have existed largely, even primarily, as temples of study for a select minority. Our Gallery is to have a more lively future and it is being developed with a much broader vision.

We look forward to the day when our national collection will have its own home, and we have every confidence that it will be a distinguished one. It will, as you know, be Canberra's privilege to have this institution, just across the lake from this national university, appropriately set alongside three other noble institutions - Parliament House, the National Library and the High Court. But just as these other institutions must, in order to retain their relevance to society understand the needs of, and serve the whole Australian community, so must the Gallery.

Art, like justice, should not only be done, but should be seen to be done. It must be available to the people. Art cut off from the larger society is isolated in an ivory tower, but when it is made available to the people, it gives Australians something to measure themselves against.

I am pleased to say that although Genesis is in the final stages of its Australian tour, it is hoped that shortly Genesis Two will be mounted. It is also hoped that exhibitions will continue to be sent on tour each year.

I understand that special exhibitions will be made available to regional and municipal galleries in order to demonstrate a particular aspect of art such as etching or print making and that it is proposed to lend works to State galleries and institutions. As well, the Gallery Council has been continuing the "art current" programme under which new works from outside Australia are acquired for circulation to centres in which there are art schools or university fine art departments. The purpose of this programme is to give students and others an opportunity to keep abreast of new ideas and methods being developed overseas.

There are also plans to establish a school lending programme under which small changing exhibitions or artefacts, arts, and crafts will be circulated to schools. If art is to flourish, it must attract the young to enjoy it.

In short, the national collection, of which you are seeing part tonight, is to be an integrated and living part of our national cultural and educational life. It should provide us with endless enjoyment and enable us to take a significant step forward in the appreciation of our art and that of the world around us.

Of course, to establish a national art collection, especially in today's art market, requires a generous long term supply of funds. The Government will, of necessity, be the primary patron and the value of the public contribution is patent. But at the same time, I believe there to be an important role for private patronage of the arts. Private patronage has the virtue of flexibility of taste. It can support the experimental and avant-garde. Competing with the public purse, it provides a safety valve against the possibility of a dictation of taste, against the making of political and personal rather than artistic judgements.

My hope would be that the education and experience provided by the national collection would increase rather than diminish private support for the arts. For seven years now, our collection has been built up mainly by Mr James Mollison. Just two weeks ago, I was pleased to announce his appointment for a term of seven years as the first Director of the Australian National Gallery. I would like to congratulate him tonight and say again that I am confident that he will continue to bring imagination and flair to the important task before him.

I am very pleased to declare the Genesis exhibition in Canberra, open.

000ooo000