



7

PRIME MINISTER

UNDER EMBARGO 5.30PM

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF PICASSO EXHIBITION
MELBOURNE - 27 JULY 1984

Mr Premier, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to have been given the opportunity to open this Exhibition.

This Exhibition provides Australians with a rare opportunity: - an opportunity to experience in this country the full range of work of one of the world's master artists - the work of a dominating personality who has significantly influenced the era in which we live.

Picasso has provided images which are at once enduring and, at the same time, characteristic of his period. He has determined in some measure for all of us - not just for practising artists - our picture of what it is to be human in the 20th century.

Picasso willingly accepted the dual responsibility of the artist - to be open to his environment and times and to record them, but also to contribute further by creating, communicating and influencing.

If I may paraphrase a quote from Picasso "what do you suppose an artist is? he is a political being constantly aware of what is going on in the world and he cannot help being shaped by it". And, I would add, shaping it. He more than most challenged the society of which he was a part.

He acknowledged that he was shaped by his era - we acknowledge in turn his power to shape and influence his contemporaries and successors.

Part of the artist's task of communicating is to encourage creativity in others. In this way our artists pass on a living culture. This Exhibition has a particular value in this regard.

Picasso's achievement, innovation, genius must be given its due. In a culturally vital society it will also encourage new creativity. Accordingly while his is acknowledged as a great view, it should be seen as only one view. Others should be influenced by it, but be prepared to travel in new directions and present different views - to be influenced and inspired but not overwhelmed.

It is regrettably a fact that - for whatever reasons - great numbers of Australians have not had the opportunity and do not have the inclination to become involved actively in the arts at any level. We all consume the arts passively at least, but too few of us are fully informed consumers, or practitioners.

We need to consider why, for so long, so many Australians have been overwhelmed - even defeated - by the encounter; why so many have earnestly avoided any contact whatever. Where does the explanation lie?

A society's attitude to the place of art in everyday living is established over considerable time. If there is alienation - if there have been restrictions on our ability to fully express ourselves in this area of life - it can only be overcome by some earnest, steady endeavour in the opposite direction.

The Government's responsibility is to provide what support and encouragement it can. The focal point of our arts policy is the concept of widening access to and participation in the arts by all sections of the community. This is firmly established in ALP policy.

The Australia Council, exercising an independent artistic judgement, has given particular priority, while not foresaking the more traditional arts, to encouraging more community involvement in the arts. Its initiatives have done much to break down the alienation - the distance - which may be separating a large number of Australians from appreciating that the arts experience in an essential element in a full and rewarding life.

To encourage people to make this effort - to actually realise their potential - requires a skilled and enthusiastic national resource of professional artists. Artists who can create, influence and communicate - who can at once integrate effectively with the community and, at the same time, challenge the society of which they are a part.

This interaction can help to erase the unfortunate impression, still too widely held, that arts workers - and I use the term worker advisedly - do not have a vital contribution to make to our community.

Artists should work to redress this jaundiced view but the country must also move more vigorously to recognise its responsibility towards the artist. Quite rightly the Australia Council, which has carefully researched the issues involved, has already acted on a number of fronts.

It has earmarked extra funding for the employment of artists - particularly for work in communities and work places. It is reviewing the level of direct grants to individual writers, painters and other artists to attempt to bring its grants more into line with average weekly earnings. It has employed artists on community projects using CEP funds, as have other national, State and local arts agencies. The Council has also adopted guidelines on the equality of opportunity for women artists. These are all necessary steps.

In parallel with these actions, the Council has initiated further exploratory work. It has, for example, appointed an Arts Employment Committee, chaired by Michael Crosby, who is National Secretary of Actors' Equity and also a member of the Council, to review such things as the factors affecting employment in all art forms, to recommend measures to increase employment for artists and to assess the impact of short-term employment schemes.

These and further programs and discussions in train with both Commonwealth and State agencies are aimed at improving the employment, remuneration and protection of artists.

I am confident that the time and energy spent in these areas will bear fruit - will lead not only to individual fulfilment - but will also provide an open, culturally alive, discriminating society: The sort of society we want and our professional artists need if they are to add their own views to the world's artistic heritage.

Picasso must count among the greatest of contributors to that heritage.

We are particularly privileged to have this Exhibition in Australia. The thanks of all of us go out to the contributors, organisers and sponsors - to Marina Picasso and Mr Jan Krugier, Jim Leslie and the International Cultural Corporation of Australia, and News Corporation and Qantas, to name but a few of those who have extended support.

I am sure all here this evening will enjoy this unique opportunity to see at the one time such wideranging examples of this great master's work. I have no doubt that many thousands, both here and in Sydney, will share this experience in the coming months. They, and hence Australia, will be the richer for it. It is for this reason I have particular pleasure in declaring the Exhibition open.
