



## PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

OPENING OF EXHIBITION  
AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA -  
MELBOURNE - 6 SEPTEMBER 1985

THE FACE OF THE CENTRE - PAPUNYA TULA PAINTINGS 1971-  
1984

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IT GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE TO BE WITH YOU THIS EVENING  
TO OPEN THIS WONDERFUL EXHIBITION OF ABORIGINAL ART: THE  
FACE OF THE CENTRE - PAPUNYA TULA PAINTINGS 1971-1984.

WE NOW RECOGNISE WITH PRIDE THAT ABORIGINAL ART IS PART  
OF THE OLDEST CONTINUOUS CULTURE IN THE WORLD. IT IS A  
LIVING GROWING CULTURE WHICH CAN BE TRACED BACK OVER  
40,000 YEARS.

OUR RECOGNITION OF THE DYNAMISM OF ABORIGINAL ART, AND  
ITS CENTRAL PLACE IN THE EMERGENCE OF A UNIQUE  
AUSTRALIAN ARTISTIC TRADITION, WAS NOT ACHIEVED  
OVERNIGHT.

FOR TOO LONG WHITE PEOPLE SAW AUSTRALIA'S ARTISTIC PLACE  
AS BEING LOCATED IN AN ANGLO-EUROPEAN TRADITION, AND WE  
WERE MUCH THE POORER FOR THIS NARROWNESS OF VISION.

ABORIGINAL ART WAS SEEN BY SOME AS A QUIANT BUT LARGELY  
IRRELEVANT SIDELINE, TO BE TAKEN HOME BY TOURISTS AS A  
SOUVENIR OF THEIR VISIT.

OTHERS WERE TOO READY TO CATEGORISE ABORIGINAL ART AS  
"PRIMITIVE ART", OR OF INTEREST PREDOMINANTLY AS  
ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIAL, REPRESENTATIVE OF A CULTURE FELT  
TO BE FAR FROM THE CONTEMPORARY REALITY OF AUSTRALIAN  
SOCIETY.

WE SEE NOW THAT SUCH VIEWS WERE VERY WRONG. ABORIGINAL  
ART OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS HAS BEEN INCREASINGLY  
RECOGNISED AS ONE OF THE MOST DYNAMIC ARTISTIC  
TRADITIONS AT WORK TODAY, AND ONE WHICH IS TRULY A  
LIVING RESPONSE TO THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION.

THIS IS WELL ILLUSTRATED BY THIS EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS FROM CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN ARTISTS, AS IS POINTED OUT IN THE MOST INFORMATIVE CATALOGUE PRODUCED BY THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA.

IN 1971, AT PAPUNYA, AND SUBSEQUENTLY AT PLACES SUCH AS KINTORE, HAAST BLUFF AND NEW BORE, THESE PAINTERS BEGAN USING A NEW MEDIUM FOR ART WHICH HAD TRADITIONALLY BEEN EXECUTED IN NON-DURABLE MATERIALS SUCH AS SAND. BY USING ACRYLIC PAINTS ON CANVAS OR BOARD THEY HAVE TRANSFERRED THEIR ART INTO A NEW AND MORE PERMANENT FORM, WITHOUT SACRIFICING THE COMPLEXITY AND RICHNESS OF THEIR SUBJECT MATTER.

THESE ARTISTS HAVE MAINTAINED THEIR ART AS A REFLECTION OF THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP THEY HAVE WITH THEIR OWN COUNTRY, WHILE TAKING UP THE MATERIALS OF THOSE WHO HAVE TRADITIONALLY VIEWED "THE CENTRE" AS AN ALIEN AND REMOTE PLACE.

I WELCOME THE OPPORTUNITY THAT THIS EXHIBITION PROVIDES FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS TO EXPAND THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE DIMENSIONS OF ABORIGINAL ART, AND ITS PLACE IN THE CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN ART SCENE.

THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA IS TO BE CONGRATULATED FOR ITS VISION IN ESTABLISHING THIS NEW GALLERY OF ABORIGINAL AND OCEANIC ART, WHICH IS AN EXCITING DEVELOPMENT IN THE GROWING AWARENESS OF THE RICHNESS AND DIVERSITY OF ABORIGINAL CULTURE.

IT IS ALSO TO BE CONGRATULATED FOR "A YEAR OF ABORIGINAL ART", IN WHICH "THE FACE OF THE CENTRE" IS THE SECOND EXHIBITION.

MAZDA SHOULD ALSO BE CONGRATULATED. IT HAS BEEN A MOST GENEROUS AND ENTHUSIASTIC SPONSOR.

I SHALL SHORTLY HAVE THE PLEASURE OF ANNOUNCING THE WINNER OF THE FIRST NATIONAL AWARD FOR THE ABORIGINAL ARTIST OF THE YEAR. THE WINNER HAS BEEN SELECTED BY THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DAY OBSERVANCE COMMITTEE (NADOC).

THIS AWARD RECOGNISES THE VITAL ROLE OF ABORIGINAL ARTISTS IN ENSURING THE SURVIVAL OF THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE. IT CONSTITUTES SINGULAR RECOGNITION OF INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS CONTRIBUTION TO THAT HERITAGE.

YOU WOULD ALL BE AWARE THAT NADOC HAS ALSO ORGANISED A RANGE OF ACTIVITIES THROUGHOUT AUSTRALIA NEXT WEEK TO MARK NATIONAL ABORIGINES' WEEK.

THIS WEEK HAS A SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS.

NATIONAL ABORIGINES' WEEK PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY FOR US ALL TO LEARN ABOUT THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN ALL FIELDS, AND THEIR SUCCESS IN MANAGING THEIR OWN AFFAIRS.

I COMMEND IT TO YOU ALL.

IT IS NOW MY PLEASURE TO DECLARE THIS EXHIBITION OPEN.

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