



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF TWENTIETH CENTURY MASTERS EXHIBITION
NATIONAL GALLERY CANBERRA - 28 FEBRUARY 1986

DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

IN 1983 I HAD THE PLEASURE OF OPENING THE FIRST OF THE MAJOR INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS DISPLAYED HERE AT THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL GALLERY - THE CHINESE ENTOMBED WARRIORS EXHIBITION - WHICH WAS AN OUTSTANDING SUCCESS. THE FOLLOWING YEAR THE GREAT IMPRESSIONISTS CAME TO THE GALLERY AND WAS ALSO HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL, ATTRACTING SOME 200,000 PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER AUSTRALIA, AS WELL AS PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND NEW ZEALAND.

AND NOW, THE THIRD SUCH INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION - THE TWENTIETH CENTURY MASTERS FROM THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK - IS ABOUT TO OPEN AND WILL, I AM SURE, BE EQUALLY SUCCESSFUL.

WHEN THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL GALLERY OPENED TO THE PUBLIC LESS THAN FOUR YEARS AGO, THERE WERE SCEPTICS WHO SAID THAT IT WAS WELL NIGH IMPOSSIBLE TO 'CREATE' ANOTHER WORLD RENOWNED ART MUSEUM. TO THOSE SCEPTICS I BELIEVE IT MUST NOW BE CLEAR THAT THE GALLERY HAS 'COME OF AGE' AS AN OUTSTANDING AND IMPRESSIVE ART MUSEUM THAT HAS ALREADY WON WORLD WIDE RECOGNITION.

MANY OF YOU MAY RECALL THAT MR WHITLAM'S ACQUISITION OF BLUE POLES WAS ALSO GREETED WITH CONSIDERABLE SCEPTICISM. BLUE POLES IS A SPLENDID WORK OF ART AND IT IS NOW SO VALUABLE THAT SELLING IT OFF COULD SUBSTANTIALLY SOLVE OUR CURRENT ACCOUNT PROBLEMS.

DURING THIS CENTURY THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART IN NEW YORK HAS BECOME ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST PRESTIGIOUS TREASURE HOUSES. THE MUSEUM DID NOT HESITATE TO LEND THIS - THE CREAM OF ITS TWENTIETH CENTURY COLLECTION - TO THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL GALLERY AND LATER TO THE QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY.

THIS SUPERB EXHIBITION IS MADE UP OF 71 PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS AND SCULPTURES. AMONG THE WORKS THAT AUSTRALIANS WILL SEE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THIS COUNTRY ARE THOSE BY THE MODERN EUROPEAN MASTERS - PICASSO, BONNARD, MATISSE, DERAIN, BECKMANN - AND PAINTINGS BY AMERICANS JOHN MARIN, JACKSON POLLOCK AND WILLEM DE KOONING. THERE ARE ALSO WORKS BY THE GREAT EARLY AMERICAN PAINTERS WHO INTRODUCED MODERN ART TO AMERICA, MARSDEN HARTLEY AND GEORGIA O'KEEFFE.

WHILE A NEW WING TO HOUSE THIS COLLECTION IS BEING ADDED TO THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM IN NEW YORK, AUSTRALIA HAS THE UNIQUE PRIVILEGE OF BORROWING THESE WORKS. FOR THIS PRIVILEGE, WE ARE INDEBTED TO THE DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEUM, MR PHILIPPE DE MONTEBELLO AND THE TRUSTEES AS WELL AS TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TWENTIETH CENTURY ART, MR WILLIAM S. LIEBERMAN, WHOSE ENCOURAGEMENT AND ENTHUSIASM MADE THIS ALL POSSIBLE.

SPECIAL THANKS MUST ALSO GO TO THE DIRECTORS AND STAFF OF BOTH THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL GALLERY AND THE QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY. THE ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF WORK AND ENERGY THAT GOES ON BEHIND THE SCENES OF THESE EXHIBITIONS IS OFTEN OVERLOOKED AND SELDOM PRAISED.

THERE IS A FURTHER LINK BETWEEN THE GALLERY AND AMERICA WHICH MAKES THE OPENING OF THIS EXHIBITION HERE PARTICULARLY APPROPRIATE. ALL OF THE PAINTINGS AND DRAWINGS THAT MAKE UP THIS EXHIBITION HAVE BEEN DONATED TO THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM BY PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS IN THE UNITED STATES.

AS MY COLLEAGUE, THE MINISTER FOR ARTS, HERITAGE AND ENVIRONMENT HAS SAID IN THE FOREWORD TO THE CATALOGUE, AUSTRALIANS HAVE LONG ADMIRERD THE GENEROSITY OF AMERICANS IN THEIR SUPPORT OF THE ARTS. THROUGH THE EFFORTS OF GORDON DARLING, THE AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL GALLERY FOUNDATION HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED.

I AM PLEASED TO SAY THE FOUNDATION UNDER ITS PRESIDENT, RICHARD PAGET, IS MAKING EXCELLENT PROGRESS IN ENLISTING TRUSTEES. ALREADY THE ASSOCIATION IS BEARING FRUIT WITH THE GENEROUS DONATION TO THE GALLERY OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN WORKS EARLIER THIS MONTH BY A MAJOR US COMPANY - SARA LEE CORPORATION, CHICAGO - FOR DISPLAY IN THE GALLERY AND REGIONAL ART GALLERIES.

FINALLY, AND FOLLOWING ON FROM WHAT BARRY COHEN SAID EARLIER, I SHOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS MY APPRECIATION TO THE GENEROUS SPONSORS OF THE EXHIBITION:

- . TO THE FLYING TIGERS AND TAA FOR THE TRANSPORT OF THE ART WORKS AND COURIERS; AND

- . TO MCPHERSONS FOR UNDERWRITING PART OF THE COST OF MOUNTING THE EXHIBITION IN CANBERRA.

MAY I ALSO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO CONGRATULATE THE ABC ON COVERING THE OPENING OF THIS MAJOR INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION.

IT NOW GIVES ME GREAT PLEASURE IN FORMALLY DECLARING OPEN THIS MAGNIFICENT EXHIBITION WHICH I AM SURE WILL PROVE TO BE A REWARDING EXPERIENCE FOR THE MANY AUSTRALIANS WHO I KNOW WILL TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE IT.
