



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF "OLD MASTERS - NEW VISION" EXHIBITION
CANBERRA - 30 SEPTEMBER 1987**

Gough Whitlam,
James Mollison,
Ladies and gentlemen

The Phillips Collection in the north-west suburbs of Washington D.C. has long been recognised as one of the compulsory stops on any tour of the art galleries of America.

This is nothing less than a superb exhibition. So it should be: it is drawn from one of the world's great private collections.

It stretches from El Greco to Rothko, and its breadth and excellence is a stunning tribute to the taste and vision and dedication of Duncan Phillips, who began assembling the paintings more than seventy years ago.

In its early days it was, as the exhibition catalogue notes, the first real museum of modern art in the United States.

Today it stands as a monumental and yet still highly personal, exposition of the entire development of European and American modernism.

By the time of his death in 1966, Duncan Phillips, assisted by his wife Marjorie Phillips, had personally created a comprehensive Art Museum tracing that development through more than two thousand paintings. He had provided as well the buildings which house the collection, and an endowment which he hoped would provide for its future.

For it now to be available for Australians to see here in Australia is an achievement of which all those responsible can be proud.

We are particularly indebted to James Mollison, who several years ago first broached the subject of an Australian tour with the custodians of the Phillips Collection in Washington.

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It is a particular pleasure to welcome tonight Mr Laughlin Phillips, the current Director of the Collection and the son of Duncan Phillips.

This is the fourth major international exhibition displayed by the Australian National Gallery, following the Chinese Entombed Warriors Exhibition, the Great Impressionists, and, last year, the 20th Century Masters from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

They were all highly successful events and in response to public demand, the Council of the Australian National Gallery recently moved to work toward staging a major international exhibition each year and to share this with two other Australian cities.

I am confident "Old Masters - New Visions" will prove an equally outstanding success with the Australian public, here in Canberra, and in Adelaide and Perth later.

As the great Australian painter, Tom Roberts, said: "By making art the perfect expression of one time and one place, it becomes art for all times and of all places."

There are many such "perfect expressions" in "Old Masters - New Visions" with Renoir's "Luncheon of the Boating Party" one of the finest.

If Tom Roberts is right, the perfection of these works ensures they are statements of equal relevance and importance to Australians in 1987 as to the first audiences who saw them.

It is that durable perfection which provides the basis for my confidence in the success of "Old Masters - New Visions".

Ladies and gentlemen

That the ANG has staged these four major exhibitions - as well as presenting its continuing displays - provides proof, if any were needed, that it has established itself as an outstanding art museum with a world-wide reputation.

The work by many individuals that goes on behind the scenes of exhibitions such as this rarely receives the praise it deserves.

So I want to express my appreciation of their efforts to James Mollison and his staff of the Australian National Gallery, and to their counterparts in the Art Galleries of Western Australia and South Australia which will also host this exhibition.

Such major exhibitions, of course, could not go ahead without the assistance of Commonwealth indemnity. I am pleased that the Federal Government was able this year to increase the indemnity ceiling to \$250 million.

But the support of a considerable number of private individuals and organisations is required as well if exhibitions of this nature are to be staged.

Merrill Lynch, as the world sponsor of the tour, deserves our special thanks. A number of other companies including QANTAS, Australian Airlines and Capital Seven TV have also provided valuable support.

Increasingly, private sponsors are being involved in Australia in the acquisition and display of art work for the benefit of the whole community. As art prices rise, this sponsorship will become more necessary.

The Australian National Gallery's own Foundation in the United States has proved very successful in the few years since it was established.

At dinner this evening the Gallery will be launching a new Foundation to act as a fundraiser within Australia for corporate and private support of its activities.

I commend this initiative and trust it will receive the support of a wide cross-section of the Australian community.

In opening "Old Masters - New Visions" it is essential to remember with gratitude the generosity, philanthropy and taste with which Duncan Phillips assembled his collection and opened it to the public.

Equally we should hope that we will see Australian art patrons increasingly display those same attributes in their support of art, and art galleries, in this country.
