



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
OPENING OF "THE FACE OF AUSTRALIA"
EXHIBITION AND RE-OPENING OF THE BALLARAT
FINE ART GALLERY
BALLARAT - 22 JULY 1988**

Mr Mayor,
John Mildren,
Councillor Coghlan (Chairman, Gallery Board of Management),
Dr Griffiths (Chairman, Gallery Building Appeal),
John Utz (Trustee, Rothmans Foundation),
Peter Sarah (ABA),
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

At the opening of this Gallery in 1890 the future Prime Minister of Australia, Alfred Deakin, said that Ballarat "had added another jewel to the diadem that encircled its brow".

This was the first regional gallery established in Australia. For more than a century it has maintained its reputation as the most important regional collection in the nation.

And with every passing year, it has vindicated in every respect Deakin's description of it as a jewel.

The Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, in its building and in its collection, reflects and enhances the vital creative role this city has played, and continues to play, in the cultural life of our nation.

When it was first constructed, the Gallery was one of the architectural gems of Ballarat's Golden era. And when the Gallery came into possession of the Eureka flag, it acquired a central relic of the tumult and the tragedy of that Gold Rush era.

The Gallery's collection of art by the Lindsay family is unparalleled. Its important Colonial and Heidelberg School paintings, its extensive collection of prints and its broad representation of 20th century art, all attest to the insight and the generosity of the Ballarat community over many years.

Today it is a pleasure to inaugurate a new era in the life of the Gallery.

After much planning and hard work, the Gallery is now about to open its doors again - double its former size. Its display areas have been improved, its facilities have been expanded, air conditioning has been installed - all of which will ensure that without doubt this jewel will continue to gleam for another hundred years and more.

Because of its historical and cultural significance to the people of Ballarat and Victoria as a whole, the renovations and additions to the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery made it particularly appropriate for inclusion in the Commonwealth-State Bicentennial Commemorative Program.

The Commonwealth is proud of the contribution it has been able to make to these renovations. And I am particularly pleased at the way in which the Gallery used the Bicentennial funds as seed money to generate further funds from within the broader community. I pay tribute to the way in which the Ballarat community including the City Council has, again, generously expressed its support for its Gallery.

I also pay tribute to the hard work on behalf of this Gallery and on behalf of Ballarat generally by your local Member of Parliament, John Mildren.

The stature of the Ballarat Gallery as Australia's premier regional gallery is recognised by the exhibition "The Face of Australia" which we are also launching this evening.

In "The Face of Australia" we are presented with a unique vision of our development as a nation through the media of painting, sculpture, photography, ceramics, prints and the decorative arts, ranging from artists' impressions of our land before 1788 to contemporary times.

Any exhibition which can boast the names of Boyd and Drysdale; Heysen and McCubbin; Nolan, Preston and Rees; Roberts and Streeton is a significant art event in its own right. But what people will find remarkable about "The Face of Australia" - people, that is, who believe the only substantial art is to be found in the national capitals - is that all these works have been drawn from regional galleries: 54 of them throughout the nation.

So this exhibition bears testimony to the richness and diversity of the holdings of our regional galleries and their importance as guardians of some of the finest and most important collections of Australian art.

"The Face of Australia" will be on show in Ballarat until 21 August. The exhibition will then split into four related components, each of which will tour through the regional galleries of Australia until next January, from Launceston to Alice Springs and from Bunbury to Townsville.

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It will, then, be in every sense a national exhibition, and all those who have worked on it can be proud of their achievement.

I commend the Australian Bicentennial Authority, the Rothmans Foundation, the curator, David Hansen, and all those who assisted in mounting the exhibition.

At the same time, I commend all those involved in the renovations to the Gallery.

The scope of the exhibition and the Gallery's magnificently refurbished display space, together show as never before the wealth of Australia's regional galleries.

And together, they reveal once more the depth and the wealth of Ballarat's cultural achievement.
