

**Supplementary
Submission
No 142b**

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

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Upper House Inquiry into museums and galleries No. 4

Submission no 3 from Jennifer Sanders, August 2016

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Summary: When the Premier announced its plan to move the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta, I was asked by former trustee and Life Fellow, Trevor Kennedy if I had alternative proposals that could be presented to Government for consideration. The following Synopsis outlines one of a number of ways that the Powerhouse Museum – Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences could contribute to the development of culture beyond its home in Ultimo, without requiring the demolition of the Powerhouse in its historic home where it is well situated to flourish as tourism and education grow in the distinctive creative precinct that the Museum has fostered over decades. It also adumbrates how the other NSW cultural and heritage institutions could contribute to a cultural renaissance in collaboration with organisations and communities in Western Sydney and across NSW.

For the past year, members of the Powerhouse Museum Alliance, a group of former trustees, Life Fellows of the Powerhouse Museum, benefactors, design and heritage experts and senior museum professionals, have been endeavouring to raise awareness of the importance of keeping the iconic Powerhouse Museum in Ultimo while developing a distinctive museum in Parramatta, one that is unique to its history, cultures and contemporary life.

Meetings have been held with the Premier, the Deputy Chief of Staff and Arts advisor for the Deputy Premier, the Treasurer, the Member for Drummoyne, the Member for Strathfield, the Chief of Staff and Arts Advisor for the Leader of the Opposition as well as Arts NSW, the Premier's Cultural Ambassador for Western Sydney and the former President of the MAAS Trust among others. The purpose of the meetings was to encourage awareness of the detrimental, indeed destructive implications of the plan to move the Powerhouse and the inaccuracies of the estimations of the costs of the move.

As importantly, each meeting was an opportunity to present a range of alternative proposals to build culture in Parramatta/Western Sydney which would be constructive not destructive, cost effective not profligate, visionary not short sighted.

This is a once in a generation opportunity for the Government to create a fair and equitable museum plan for the 21st century that supports museums and communities in Western Sydney and regional NSW, and landmark museums in Sydney.

A CULTURAL PLAN FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

JENNIFER SANDERS

APRIL 2015

Extract: Synopsis of Plan

THE PLAN

The decision to increase the cultural capital of Western Sydney is timely, logical and exciting given the population density and diversity in this fast-growing region of the Sydney basin. Several Government studies and policies elaborate on both the drivers and strategies addressed in the 2015 *Create NSW* Policy.

One of the major strategies is to relocate the Powerhouse Museum from Ultimo, where it has been since 1893, to a site in Parramatta/Western Sydney. However, significant drawbacks to this proposal have been identified by a range of stakeholders.

The Powerhouse Museum is a seminal element of Sydney's cultural institutions founded after the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879. It has amassed a fabulous collection of extraordinary breadth and value. The Museum is an internationally renowned award winning building of great industrial and spatial character perfectly suited to presenting internationally significant objects of imposing scale and visual impact.

From 1893, the Museum has been identified with Ultimo - adjacent to the city urban core, a revitalised Darling Harbour and Barangaroo - as a key educational and cultural institution. The proposal to move the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta fails to address its status as a primary urban element.

This paper proposes a 21st century Cultural Plan which addresses the *Create NSW* policy framework and which has a range of more holistic and long term outcomes that will benefit the people of NSW and, tourists and visitors to the Sydney CBD, Greater Sydney, NSW and, indeed the Nation. Furthermore, the Plan addresses the great potential inherent in the focus on Parramatta/Western Sydney.

This Plan will:

- Harness corporate support and private benefaction which will readily identify with the overarching theme of each institution.
- Encourage alignment with government policies and goals as successful outcomes can be more readily achieved by focussed institutions.
- Provide a framework for regional museums and collections to connect with in order to better promote their offerings and, interpret their heritage.
- Offer strong themes for connecting to and interacting with diverse communities to foster understanding and empathy.
- Foster opportunities for cultural tourism as there will be more immediate connections between offerings and markets.
- Afford specialist societies, individuals and organisations affiliated with the themes of each museum opportunities to give their support, expertise and benefaction.
- Maximise opportunities to interpret and communicate three of the State's most significant collections of cultural heritage: NSW' Social History; Decorative Arts and Design; and Science and Technology – all of which are encompassed by the present Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences – now manifest as the Powerhouse Museum at Ultimo; Sydney Observatory at Observatory Hill; and, The Powerhouse Discovery Centre at Castle Hill.
- Provide the physical facilities and resources at lower costs and with more efficient and productive processes as well as using existing underutilised landmark government buildings.

This **Cultural Plan** recognises that there is a worldwide shift across museums to present ideas and collections in more focussed, audience and stakeholder tailored museums rather than as broad, all-encompassing experiences. This shift responds to changing demographics; the need to better link people, ideas and collections; and the opportunities to marry heritage and contemporary experiences in ways that foster knowledge of the past so as to better understand the present, and envision the future.

3 NEW MUSEUMS FROM ONE VENERABLE INSTITUTION

The **Plan** is to establish 3 new cultural institutions as the logical evolution of the current Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. These 3 new museums will bring strength and focus to 3 significant Collections and Knowledge Centres which have been built up with considerable government and corporate investment and, private benefaction, since 1880.

Together, the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences' 3 Collections of Science and Technology; Decorative Arts and Design; and Social History number around 500,000 objects – and now valued at more than \$400 million. The time has come to maximise the potential of this extraordinary State cultural and educational asset by 'evolving' 3 museums from what will be seen as the 'foundation' museum, - the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences.

Each of these 3 Collections includes objects of international, national and state significance. Each of these 3 Collections has a myriad of stories to inspire audiences to engage with the reality of the 3 dimensional as a stark contrast to the unreality of the virtual.

The momentum for this development is unarguably strong: the total collection of the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences has vastly increased from 30,000 specimens in 1889 to approx 500,000 objects today – a critical mass that can easily 'found' the 3 planned Museums; the population of Sydney was 221,000 in 1881 and is projected to reach 5 million in the next year. Clearly there is a different equation informing cultural planning now and for the future as we can envisage it. A greater number of people over greater area demands more tailored and diversified solutions to make the most of the State's cultural assets. Similarly, the growth of the tourism market, especially cultural tourism, means we should refine our offerings to best reach different segments.

To put it in context - in London, the world renowned Victoria and Albert museum of decorative arts and design sits separate to the famous Science Museum. These two signature museums are enhanced by a myriad of smaller single subject museums like Sir John Soane's Museum of Soane's neoclassical architecture and collections of antiquities and works of art, The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, the Geffrye Museum of period rooms, and the William Morris Gallery devoted to the life and work of this still influential 19th c designer. In New York, the Cooper Hewitt Museum of Design has recently reopened to rave reviews in its historic house on 5th Ave just along from the Neue Galerie devoted with great success to German and Austrian Art and across town from MAD, the Museum of Arts and Design. In Paris, the experience of visiting the Musee des Arts Decoratifs is complemented by several 'boutique' museums focussed on particular collections such as the medieval tapestries of Musee Cluny, the Asian art of Musee Guimet, Musee Jaquesmart-Andre showing the collection of the two extraordinary connoisseurs. The imposing Musee D'Orsay housed in the former railway station Gare D'Orsay and displaying art, photography, architecture and art from 1848 – 1914 is a quite different experience to the grandeur and world scope of the Louvre.

The age of the cultural megaplexes is over. Far better to offer 3 discrete and distinctive cultural experiences rather than an all-in-one behemoth which is impossible to appreciate in one or even three visits, leaves one exhausted and, which has such diverse experiences that audiences tend to be fragmented by interests.

This strategy of evolving MAAS into 3 Museums by 3 cohesive themes, rather than clinging to the current all encompassing single institution, will allow for increased public exposure to the collections and, a greater depth of experiences in the exhibitions and programming.

It will be less of an overwhelming edifice experience but more nuanced, collection oriented and audience tailored experiences.

This is a strategy for Sydney and New South Wales in the 21st century which will align leisure, cultural tourism and education audiences with major themes, ideas and collections which resonate with contemporary passions, curiosities, issues, interests and curricula.

This idea applies equally to the other state cultural institutions.

THE 3 MUSEUMS: evolved from the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences

Mnsw

MUSEUM OF NEW SOUTH WALES

@ Parramatta/Western Sydney Cultural Precinct

Complemented by Exhibit: Cultural Collections Exhibition Gallery

and Experimenta: Powerhouse Museum's science satellite

Phm

POWERHOUSE MUSEUM OF SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY & DESIGN

@ Ultimo education and innovation precinct

MoDA

MUSEUM OF DECORATIVE ARTS

@ Sydney CBD cultural precinct

All supported by the existing Powerhouse Discovery Centre @ Castle Hill renewed as

MaCnsw

MUSEUMS ACCESS CENTRE NSW

@ Castle Hill

THE MUSEUMS

Mnsw

MUSEUM OF NEW SOUTH WALES

@ Parramatta/Western Sydney Cultural Precinct

Complemented by a new cultural facility - **Exhibit: Cultural Collections Exhibitions Gallery** which will present the best local, regional, state, national and international touring exhibitions to audiences from Western Sydney, interstate and intrastate.

Both museum and gallery co-located in a new glass/steel buildings linked to/incorporating heritage sites/buildings such as The Female Factory; Old Kings School.

Rationale:

New South Wales does not have a museum dedicated to the history and cultures of this state. Yet it is the site of Australia's first settlement by convicts and free men and women; its records tell of manifold interactions with Indigenous cultures as exploration and settlement reached across the state; and, its character and qualities have been and continue to be shaped by waves of migration from all corners of the world.

The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences is custodian of the State's major collection of historical objects illustrating the history of New South Wales and acquired since its beginnings in 1880. From the early 1980s, the Museum began a designated Social History of New South Wales collection, including Indigenous History and Culture.

In 2003, the Museum was given responsibility for the NSW Migration Heritage Centre benefiting from the Centre's partnerships with a range of culturally diverse communities – both in a contemporary context and, through exploration of their heritage in New South Wales history.

The locale of Parramatta/Western Sydney is ideal for the establishment of the Museum of NSW as it has a distinctive and important history that can be explored through Indigenous history and culture; the colonial period, with early agriculture, river settlements and trade along the Hawkesbury, Nepean and Parramatta rivers, Governors in residence and, its convict history. The history of the Cumberland Plain speaks of a wider story of a settlement learning to survive and thrive; and, expeditions of exploration west beyond the Blue Mountains and north and south which opened up NSW to settlement. In recent history, the region has become a vibrant home for many culturally diverse communities making it in some ways a mirror for the wider Australian story.

Western Sydney is home to several organisations, educational institutions and government departments which would be ideal partners for the Museum of New South Wales in presenting programs and exhibitions telling the stories of New South Wales – past, present and projected: Sydney Living Museums at Elizabeth Farm and Rouse Hill; State Archives at Kingswood; Environment and Heritage who are custodians for National Parks, Reserves and sites in the Cumberland Plain and Blue Mountains; Mt Tomah and Mt Annan Botanic Gardens; University of Western Sydney; Macquarie University; the National Trust NSW; Historical

Societies; Local Government represented by the WSROC; Parramatta Heritage Centre and the network of Regional Museums and Galleries to name just a few.

A state museum focussed on New South Wales history in a contemporary context would open up many avenues for audience engagement, learning, participation and reflection with the goals of broadening perspectives, widening horizons and deepening understanding.

Exhibit: Cultural Collections Exhibitions Gallery will complement the Museum of New South Wales by presenting wider perspectives on culture and heritage – a contemporary lens through which to view the past and experience the present.

Exhibitions from the State cultural institutions will program enriched by locally curated exhibitions of contemporary art and cultures; touring exhibitions from galleries and museums across Australia and from overseas – the best and brightest exhibitions for the audiences it aspires to engage.

Bendigo Art Gallery delivers a brilliantly successful example of such an exhibition program.

Phm

POWERHOUSE MUSEUM OF SCIENCE TECHNOLOGY & DESIGN

@ Ultimo education, creativity and innovation precinct

At the Ultimo Powerhouse site proper (Ultimo Tram Shed site to be sold including air rights over Goods Line) bounded by William Henry Street, Harris Street, Macarthur Street and the Goods Line.

Incorporating a new cultural tourism and science education facility

Powerhouse Planetarium @ Ultimo

sited on the Powerhouse courtyard (Harris Street or former coal bunker)

and a new science and technology education satellite

Experimenta: the Powerhouse Museum satellite @ Parramatta/Western Sydney

As well as the Museum's historic working site

Sydney Observatory @ Observatory Hill.

Rationale: The Museum of Applied and Sciences has Australia's preeminent collection of Science and Technology with a collecting history dating to the Sydney International Exhibition of 1879.

From the outset, the Science and Technology Collection was assembled with the aim of presenting contemporary developments in science and technology that were shaping a rapidly changing world. There has been throughout an emphasis on collecting and displaying examples of Australian creativity and innovation in an international context within the four main fields of Sciences; Engineering and Design; Transport; and Information Technologies.

Since 1893, the Museum has been a key contributor to the Ultimo education precinct. With the opening of the Powerhouse Museum in the former Ultimo Powerhouse, the Museum became a major cultural and tourist destination as well as educational institution.

The Museum's rebirth as the Powerhouse Museum in the former Ultimo Powerhouse site was, in itself, an architecturally innovative project that resulted in the derelict industrial site repurposed and renewed with the latest building and engineering technologies to make it 'fit for purpose' as a world class museum. This has been recognised with major architectural, engineering, museum and tourism awards.

The **Powerhouse Museum of Science and Technology** is, in Ultimo, ideally placed to foster cross disciplinary approaches to challenges in science and technology through DesignThinkLabs bringing together in public fora, a range of discipline experts and lateral thinkers to solve the 'wicked problems' – and to address the simple challenges using design thinking. The Museum's proximity to the 3 major universities and their research schools and, to Sydney's Silicon Valley - the ICT Precinct in Pyrmont/Ultimo (the largest in Australia); as well as the Creative Hub flourishing in Surry Hills means the Museum is front and centre to be a window, and explainer for the public to understand and be excited by fast developing areas of creativity and innovation – the Knowledge Economy.

New South Wales is uniquely positioned to explore and celebrate Australia's past and current achievements in space science, space technology and, in astronomy. Two leading observatories are within NSW – at Parkes and at Siding Springs near Coonabarabran – with Mt Stromlo Observatory nearby in the ACT. And Australia is a partner in SKA – the Square Kilometre Array telescope project

The **Powerhouse Museum of Science and Technology @ Ultimo** would be greatly enhanced by the addition of a state of the art **Powerhouse Planetarium** presenting extensive astronomy, and space science and exploration programs; and with the capacity to show non astronomy programs. The facility would also be a distinctive offering for the new Convention and Exhibition Centres to partner with, and add significantly to the cultural and educational assets in the Darling Harbour precinct.

A planetarium would not only explain the wonders of our solar system but also extend our vision, and our horizons way beyond the galaxy and allow us to follow the discoveries of the exploratory satellites and telescopes being launched on voyages to the outer limits. Space is a new frontier for us all.

The **Powerhouse Museum of Science and Technology's satellite – Experimenta**, is planned to be located in the Parramatta/Western Sydney Region so that the Powerhouse can present its signature Science and Technology interactive experiences, and broaden its capacity to reach audiences across Greater Sydney and beyond, especially educational audiences.

Mirroring and expanding on the interactive Science and Technology exhibits at the parent museum in Ultimo, **Experimenta** will provide an immersive experience for informal and formal education programs tailored for students from primary to tertiary. The DesignThink Labs experience will be a key element for secondary and tertiary students as the challenge of building and nurturing Australia's Knowledge Economy is critical to our future.

MoDA

MUSEUM OF DECORATIVE ARTS

@ Sydney CBD Cultural precinct

Australia's first and only museum of decorative arts and design

Located in the cultural and heritage precinct anchored by Macquarie Street – a renewal of an existing landmark government building for public cultural use: such as Registrar-General's building; No 1 Hospital Road; Chief Secretary's Building

Rationale: Since the Powerhouse Museum redevelopment project was announced in 1979, decorative arts and design specialists, collectors, makers, educators, retailers and interest groups have been powerfully lobbying at various times for the collection to be housed in a Decorative Arts Museum in a CBD location. The goal has always been to build the cultural capital of the Macquarie Street precinct and, to attract additional audiences for Decorative Arts and Design exhibitions who were not visiting the Powerhouse's Ultimo location regularly - if at all.

The consistent reasoning is that the collection and exhibitions encompassed by the MAAS Decorative Arts and Design holdings are best suited to Sydney's cultural precinct that takes in the Art Gallery of NSW; the Royal Botanic Gardens; the State Library of NSW, Sydney Living Museums; Bridge Street especially the Lands Building and the Chief Secretary's; the Conservatorium of Music; Government House; Sydney Opera House and the Museum of Contemporary Art. This is the Sydney CBD Cultural Precinct identified in the 2014 *Infrastructure NSW* report.

Not only is the co-location of this suite of cultural attractions a powerful statement of the richness of the State's cultural heritage, but this aggregation encourages cultural tourism and educational experiences which are aimed at complementary audience ranges and especially, the State's major tourism market.

The MAAS' Decorative Arts and Design collection is recognised as one of Australia's best, acknowledged for its depth and scope, and, for the high quality of key objects and collection groupings. A number of outstanding objects are of world class - several of which have been borrowed by museums across the world.

The Collection numbers around 150,000 objects representing the best of Australian craftsmanship and design in the context of a significant International collection, especially strong in 18th, 19th and 20th century European and Australian works. Contemporary Australian crafts and design are well represented. Overall, the Collection dates from antiquity to the present and covers Europe, Asia, the Pacific, Africa and the Americas to a greater or lesser degree. It is an outstanding asset which in recent years has been largely hidden from public view.

Overarching theme of **MoDA**:

decorative arts – made to serve a practical purpose but nevertheless prized for the quality of their workmanship and the beauty of their appearance (The Oxford Companion to the Decorative Arts, OUP, 1975).

Ethereal, lyrical, stunning, surprising, intense, iconic, absorbing, overwhelming, theatrical, inspirational - **MoDA** will embrace literature, painting, architecture, floral arts, poetry, music, architecture and performance to bring to life the periods, sensibilities and forces that influenced the styles that define histories and characterise our cultural heritage and contemporary context. The stories of individuals & movements, traditions and innovations will be told through object arrays, assemblages, tableaux, contrasts and single displays of iconic works.

MoDA's success will be considerably enhanced by through relationships with private collectors and other state, national and international museums. **MoDA's** Decorative Arts and Design collection is an excellent foundation and counterpoint against which a diverse range of ideas and themes embodied in loan collections can be presented in a temporary exhibition program. International museums will be important partners in cultural exchange as there is a burgeoning interest in exhibitions showcasing the distinctive arts and cultures of foreign countries.

The establishment of **MoDA** will give Sydney and New South Wales, indeed Australia, a magnificent new cultural locus within which the riches in New South Wales' outstanding Design and Decorative Arts collection can be revealed, explored and celebrated.

MaCnsw

MUSEUMS ACCESS CENTRE NSW

@ Castle Hill

A renewal, expansion and strengthening of the existing facility so as to accommodate collections currently stored at the Powerhouse Museum as well as the collections of the Australian Museum and Sydney Living Museums. The publicly accessible facility will also be the location for a suite of shared Museum Services.

Rationale:

The plan to create 3 museums from the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences provides the opportunity to centralise Collection Services for NSW's Cultural Collections stored at the Castle Hill Accessible Store. This would encompass the 3 Collections devolved from the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences: Social History; Science and Technology; Decorative Arts and Design and, the collections of Sydney Living Museums, and of the Australian Museum which are to be housed in the redeveloped Castle Hill Accessible Storage Centre.

The **Museums Access Centre NSW** also offers the opportunity to centralise other services and functions common to all the institutions represented on the Castle Hill site. Such services could include Facilities Management; Project Management; Exhibition Services; Information Technology Services and Administrative Services.

Experimenta, the Powerhouse Museum' satellite could be sited here as a year round attraction and add considerably to the variety of experiences – educational and leisure – to attract audiences.

Conclusion

This Cultural Plan is but one proposal for re thinking the role and future of the major cultural institutions in NSW. This is the time to develop, in consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, a Policy and Plan for museums and galleries across NSW which encompasses the needs of communities and audiences across the state and, which ensures that NSW's distinctive and irreplaceable cultural heritage is properly cared for and publicly accessible.

This Inquiry is an opportunity to enrich New South Wales' cultural landscape even though it is borne out of a clear and present danger to the future of one of Australia's, indeed the world's leading museums, the Powerhouse Museum. It is recommended that the opportunity be grasped with both hands, and that the move of the Powerhouse Museum from Ultimo to Parramatta be abandoned. Instead, a cultural beacon for Parramatta should be developed in close consultation with the people of Western Sydney to best reflect their distinctive cultures, history and contemporary life.

Jennifer Sanders

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