

**Supplementary  
Submission  
No 155a**

## **INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES**

**Name:** Mr Lionel Glendenning

**Date received:** 21 August 2016

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The Hon Robert Borsak MLC  
Committee Chair,  
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 4,  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Sydney NSW 2000

## **Upper House Inquiry into museums and galleries No. 4**

Submission from Lionel Glendenning

This submission addresses Terms of Reference 1a), 1c), 1e), 1f), 1h)

### **Synopsis:**

#### **Cultural Investment**

The coarse 'economic rationalist' neoliberal evangelistic capitalism 'philosophy' where taxpayers fund development profits from 'saleable assets' (asset stripping) is voodoo economics. Generational investments, particularly core cultural institutions like the Powerhouse Museum, Australian Museum, Art Gallery of NSW and Sydney Opera House are not 'saleable'.

They belong to the people in perpetuity held in trust by this generation and all governments. It ill behoves a non consultative, messianic Premier, Deputy Premier and Finance Minister to disabuse this trust advised by poorly informed and inexperienced advisors, 'cultural ambassadors' and politically appointed trustees.

With proper planning, process and experienced cultural advice and consultation, there are ample opportunities to significantly enhance and strengthen NSW cultural sector, in particular its museums and galleries which are suffering from chronic underfunding and ad hoc decision making resulting in a sense of fear, apprehension and uncertainty pervading the sector.

#### **Commentary:**

The Powerhouse Museum is a 100 year Bicentennial investment in a core Sydney cultural institution that, in a radial city is accessible to all in New South Wales as well as Australian and international visitors. Adjacent to the CBD, in Darling Harbour, the genesis of the 'creative precinct' of Pyrmont, Ultimo, Eveleigh – a 5 min walk or tram ride from Central Station and buses in Broadway, on the city bus shuttle stops, and 8 km from the major domestic and international airports.

The Powerhouse is beside Darling Harbour with an expected 40 million visitors pa – as a major tourist attraction in the precinct, Government should be expanding the Powerhouse Museum not moving it.

An investment of some \$600 million to \$1 billion in a move to Parramatta would be a massive disinvestment in regional museums and galleries for no discernible gain for Sydney, or for the people of Western Sydney.

Western Sydney has great potential for a multidimensional icon – a shared centre of excellence where a combined Sydney Modern and MCA share exhibition spaces with rotating exhibitions from the Powerhouse Museum, Australian Museum, and permanent spaces for a locally developed cultural icon that might focus on Indigenous cultures vested in the language groups of the region, and on migration and settlement themes evolving from the multicultural demographic characteristic of Western Sydney.

It might also be time to reassess the MCA location at Circular Quay in the dysfunctional Maritime Services Board building with its multiple entries, poor circulation, inadequate galleries and limited access – a 'large cafe with a gallery attached'. The Sydney Opera House upgrade continues to fail to solve both acoustic contradictions and accessibility issues implicit in its multi-use halls and sacred status. Leave it as it is!

Better to invest in a pure concert hall below ground on the west Circular Quay/MCA site with a glass lobby restaurants, cafes, retail - 2 levels above ground – piazza- similar to the Louvre in Paris in a new fit for purpose, acoustically perfect performance space (vertical circulation by lifts and escalators). MCA returns to University of Sydney to be displayed in their new museum as per the original Power bequest or, attaches to Sydney Modern as part of Parramatta's cultural development for Western Sydney.

Western Sydney has undervalued and under threat heritage in Liverpool Hospital by convict architect, Francis Greenway. Parramatta has the nationally significant Fleet Street precinct including the Female Factory (also Francis Greenway and commissioned by Governor Macquarie) that is eminently suitable for a combined cultural/arts facility that would showcase the distinctive colonial heritage of Parramatta and bring to life a forgotten and underappreciated atmospheric complex of built and landscape heritage. The collections of the

State's major cultural institutions could all contribute to a rich program of exhibitions anchored by the arts and cultural sector of Western Sydney. Long have they campaigned for a gallery to showcase their work and to inspire audiences – as has the museum and heritage sector been vocal in their call for support for the distinctive stories of Parramatta's history and culture to be given voice through their city's built heritage. The Fleet Street precinct offers a myriad of opportunities to mix state of the art museum and gallery spaces with restored and interpreted heritage environments. There is a wealth of collections in the major institutions that could complement and contribute to such a cultural beacon.

Increasingly, over scale and almost dysfunctional mega cultural institutions (the Louvre in Paris is such an example – more like an airport experience than a modern museum experience) continue to soak up available funding.

Bigger is not better – many local smaller scale facilities are more effective in spreading the impact of collections, exhibitions, programs, marketing and funding enriching the local experience, education and impact whilst ensuring the Government's 'social license' and largesse are spread across New South Wales within easy reach of local people and communities and, encouraging cultural tourists to take cultural heritage trails across the State. At the same time, the foundation of collections, experience and professional excellence is maintained in the city's core.

#### **Strategies for cultural investment:**

- A one off capital grant for land/construction and a grant for 1<sup>st</sup> year operation
- Government should introduce a dollar for dollar acquisition fund for each satellite
- Each satellite institution would receive a foundation grant of \$5,000,000 invested to produce an annual income of \$250,000
- Entry to permanent exhibitions should be free (2/3<sup>rd</sup> of gallery spaces) with nominal charges (seniors, members and student discounts) for entry to touring and special exhibitions. It is unfair of the Government to charge taxpayers twice to use government facilities ie. tax then charge.
- A new oversight body, Cultural Investment Oversight, for the combined cultural institutions would oversee and coordinate the implementation of the cultural investment collections programs – the CIO group meeting annually to advise government and made up of museum directors, distinguished patrons, past directors and Arts NSW.
- Combine MCA and Sydney Modern so as to develop the west Circular Quay site as a state of the art concert and performance venue.
- Set up new funding models to develop and sustain regional culture in NSW

#### **Summary and Recommendations:**

Parramatta City Council has never invested in a new gallery or museum yet now wants a new facility to rationalise culture-free development at the centre of Parramatta. However such a facility will be a more powerful and distinctive cultural statement if it derives from home grown community based consultation to develop preferred themes – such as Indigenous cultures, colonial heritage, migration and settlement stories, contemporary cultural diversity and creativity, technological innovation, agriculture, life the Cumberland Plain, flora and fauna, environmental features, Hawkesbury/Nepean/Parramatta river systems and flood plains, over the sandstone divide etc.

Models for regional 'centres of excellence' satellites for city-based collections and touring exhibition programs should be developed as a key plank of a NSW Cultural Policy as a strategy to distribute cultural funding and capacity and ensure collaboration and development of cultural and heritage potential across NSW. This should be planned in concert with Destination NSW so that a healthy and sustainable cultural tourism sector can be strategically strengthened.

The chaotic, unfair and short-sighted funding and project criteria need a strong and clear process and decision-making advisory process for government investment in culture. The erratic and ad hoc bidding process needs to stop with a clearer mid and long term development strategy in place before any more 'vanity' projects are undertaken.

Lionel Glendenning

I am happy for my submission to be published with my name attached.

I am happy to appear as a witness at the Inquiry

## **Lionel Glendenning**

### **Brief Resume**

**Lionel Glendenning** AA STC Hons, B,Arch Hons 1 UNSW, M.Arch. Harvard, Dip. Environ St. Macq.

Inaugural Robert Gordon Menzies Scholar, 1968 to Harvard University Graduate School of Design

Life Fellow, Powerhouse Museum

Architect (retd), Design tutor: UNSW, Syd U, UTS.

Design Director HBO+EMTB 1988 - 2012

Principal Architect Public Buildings, NSW Government Architect's Office 1984 - 1988

RAIA NSW Merit Awards:

- Claymore Public School
- IMAX Theatre, Darling Harbour
- Bicentennial Park, Homebush Bay;

Architect of Record: Powerhouse Museum

### **Powerhouse Museum Awards: 1988**

Sulman Award for Architectural Merit, Royal Australian Institute of Architects New South Wales

President's Award for Recycled Buildings, Royal Australian Institute of Architects National Awards

Belle Awards for Interiors, Royal Australian Institute of Architects

Meritorious Lighting Award – Institutions, the Illuminating Engineering Society of Australia

Australian Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled Award for Barrier-free Circulation

Winner, Tourist Attractions, Australian Tourism Awards

New South Wales Tourism Award for Excellence, New South Wales Tourism Commission

Best Museum Category A, Westpac Museum of the Year Awards