

INQUIRY INTO MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

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Submission III: A possible alternative cultural centre/museum focused on human creativity and the creativity of western Sydney's multi-cultural Communities, within the historic mantle of migration, instead of the failed and impractical concept of 'moving' the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta. Submission to the Upper House Inquiry into museums and galleries in NSW, August 8, 2016.

[Relevant terms of reference: (a) (b) (d) (e) (h)]

Dr LG Sharp, Founding Director, Powerhouse Museum 1978-1988,

PLEASE CALL ME AS A WITNESS FOR THIS AND OTHER SUBMISSIONS

Key words: new cultural concept; search for alternatives which are cost effective; consult widely and deeply with Communities in western Sydney; access to major State Collections; obtain marketing and visitor research reports and documentation from Government in regard to the failed concept of 'moving' the Powerhouse Museum; building on MAAS collection strengths of art and science linked through design= human creativity; call for a Committee to analyse existing plans, survey public opinion and suggest a range of alternative concepts to 'moving' the Powerhouse Museum/MAAS.

'Museum of Migration, Creativity, Art and Science' -

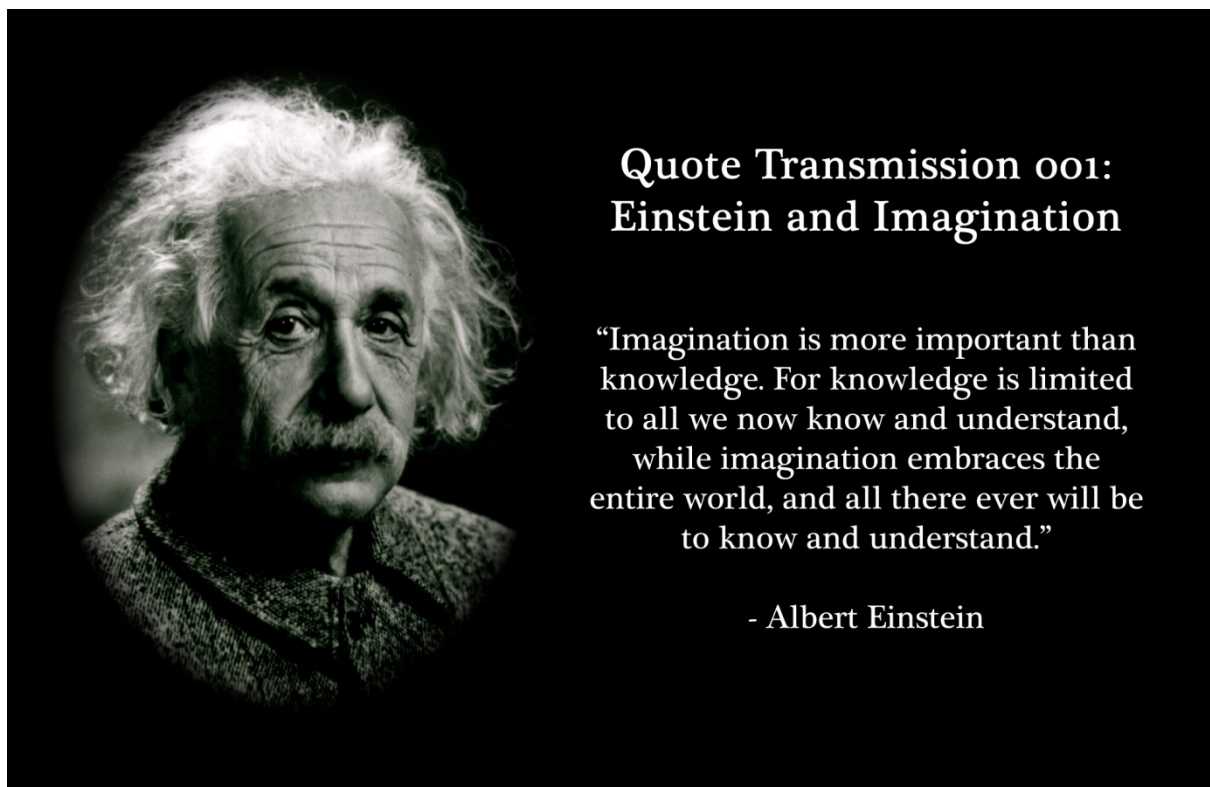
MOMCAS: 'POWERHOUSE MUSEUM TO PARRAMATTA?'- A NEW OPTION

Einstein:

"The greatest scientists are artists as well," (Calaprice, 2000, 245).

"The mere formulation of a problem is far more essential than its solution, which may be merely a matter of mathematical or experimental skills. To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle requires creative imagination and marks real advances in science."

As one of the pre-eminent physicists of all time and a fine amateur pianist and violinist, Albert understood creativity, the nature of creative thinking and how we should stimulate it. Above all he saw creativity as a spectrum from art to science, without boundaries, united through our imaginations and our ability to formulate new questions and new, creative ways to answer them. Imagination and creativity are covalent.



Executive Summary:

As Minister for Western Sydney, our Premier has created a working hypothesis based on demographic and political reality- GWS (Greater Western Sydney) deserves a world-class focus for its creative cultures. His 'thought-bubble' obsession to date has been on 'moving' the Powerhouse Museum- although the costs of doing so to a standard comparable with existing buildings will far outweigh funds realised by the sale of the Ultimo site; will also waste at least \$200 million investment in the existing purpose-built buildings (more like \$460 million); will continue feeding an increasingly toxic battle with opponents of the 'move' from east and west Sydney; while entirely failing to find out what people in Greater Western Sydney actually need and want.

It is hard to imagine a more negative environment into which a new cultural institution would be launched.

Government needs a circuit breaker before proceeding with the existing 'plan'. If the 'Policy' setting remains the same the Board of Trustees and the newly chosen CEO and Directors will be deeply embarrassed in the Inquiry for no good reason; and the Government and Board will continue to proceed in an ever-deepening toxic environment. To simply argue it is a 'Done deal' merely demonstrates Government's 'thought-bubble' approach, its inability to plan appropriately without full consultation and indicates a wanton aspect to wasting money, let alone destroying heritage and fiscal value.

Government has sufficient funds available after sale of the poles and wires and a net positive Budget balance (2016-2017) of over \$3 billion- it simply does not choose to apply it fairly in Greater Western Sydney and throughout NSW.

Unlike other states and territories, and with a few exceptions such as some historic houses, NSW does not have branch or satellite museums in the west or regional NSW. This makes the distribution of museums and cultural collections particularly unbalanced in terms of access, equity and important themes for the history and culture of NSW. This proposal moves a significant way towards solving part of that problem.

The time has come to think outside the narrow confines of traditional museology and the wrecker's ball- to take on board the success of places like Carriageworks, migration museums and Dublin's Science Gallery. To accept the power of a multi-institution destination such as Melbourne's Federation Square (3.2 hectares), but in an entirely new architectural idiom and with a new mix of institutions which reflect the migrant history and creativity of New South Wales.

This proposal, at lower cost, smaller site size, faster speed, greater originality, enhanced 'Big Ten' co-operation, and exemplary uniqueness would demonstrate this Government's own creative thinking while capitalising on existing collections, strengths and synergies. Still, any and all of its details should primarily be seen as 'thought starters' for the essential conversation with Communities in Greater Western Sydney.



Frank Gehry, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain

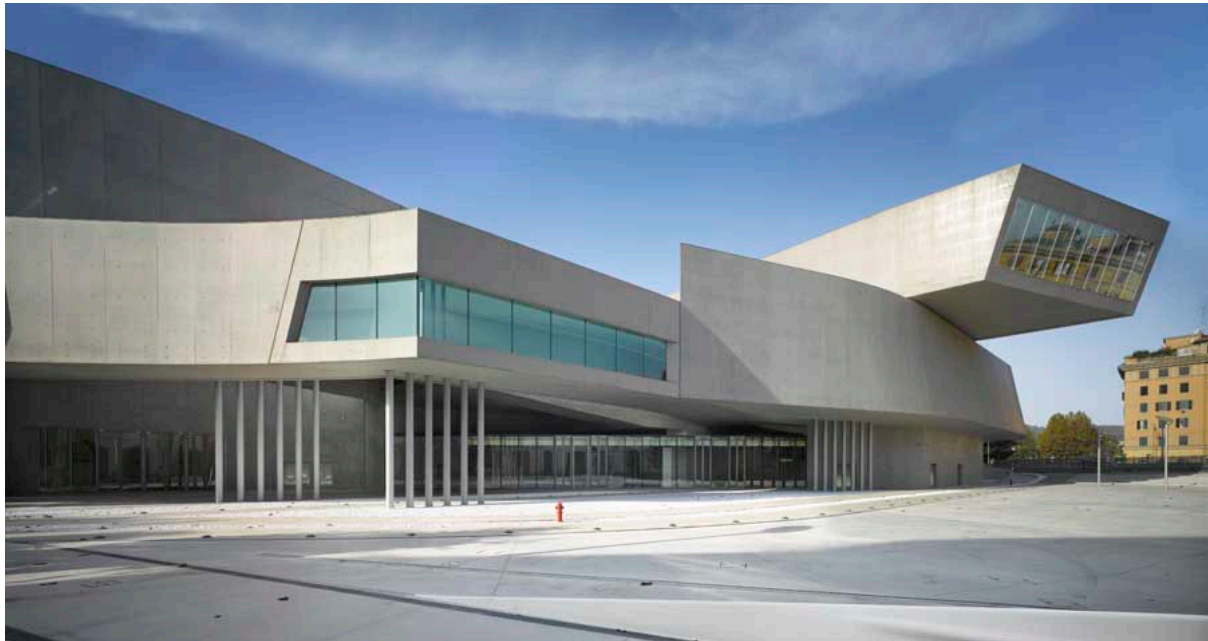
(See also Dr Grace Cochrane's submission in regards to this context and subject; and that from the North Parramatta Action Group)

The context:

A critical issue, before pre-determining decisions are taken, is to find out what the people of Greater Western Sydney want for themselves, their communities and their shared aspirations. It is completely sub-optimal to simply place a reworked, smaller, brand-confusing institution (what is a MAAS? Intellectually confused, marketing claptrap) in the centre of Parramatta without a full survey, commissioned by an independent panel of selected local citizens and museum and cultural experts, chaired by an independent person of stature, cultural expertise and demonstrated practicality, acceptable to all stakeholders. This panel, chosen by the Minister for the Arts, should be adequately resourced and tasked to provide a range of costed options, with SWOT issues identified and recommendations supplied for Government's consideration. Failure to do confirms that this Government is undemocratic and motivated principally by sale of the present site to one of a few large developers

Greater Western Sydney now has a population in excess of 2 million people; a Regional Product of in excess of A \$105 Billion; an expanding geographic coverage; and would be Australia's third largest city if denominated as a separate unit. GWS also has three Institutes of higher learning and is developing Parramatta's CBD in an expansive fashion, which illuminates the GWS capacity in planning, the creative industries and modern business initiatives, as well as its more traditional industrial and logistical base. Pragmatically, GWS is also home to an incredible array of ethnic backgrounds, languages and cultural practices and is at the heart of State and Federal politics.

Whoever wins in GWS has a fair opportunity of winning overall at those levels. To say as much is simply to recognise the power of demography, economics and cultural identification. It also has a host of schools, historic sites- arguably the most important heritage precinct for post-1788 history in Australia- local and other galleries and the Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre (CPAC).



Hadid: MAAXI Museum, Rome

Yet, GWS is bereft of a major Cultural Institution - as represented in the 'Big Eight'- The Art Gallery of NSW (AGNSW); the Powerhouse Museum (PhM); The State library (SL); The Australian Museum (AM); Sydney Theatre Company (STC); Sydney Living Museums (SLM); the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) and the Opera House/Australian Opera (OHAO)- in no particular order. This is not to say GWS does not have a thriving cultural life- far from it- just that for Regional residents to visit the Big Eight can be time-consuming, expensive and, given that GWS pays a large proportion of State and Federal taxes, inherently unfair. Hence the proposal to 'move' the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta's CBD in its entirety. And the 'Big Eight' could even be expanded to the 'Big Ten' if the Conservatorium and the Royal Botanic Gardens are added.

A new Concept:

An innovative 'Museum of Migration, Creativity, Art and Science' MOMCAS [working title] would have as great, if not greater international impact than Hobart's MONA and would indelibly stamp the Government's claim to truly support Greater Western Sydney and Parramatta as a National Cultural

Centre with world-class cultural and educational opportunities.



Frank Gehry: UTS building in Ultimo-Pyrmont. Uniquely creative. Art and engineering combined.

The new cluster of buildings, while spectacular in design, would not need the massive cubic spaces of the present heritage buildings, because the massive objects would stay where they are. The intermediate and compact gems of many collections, owned by the people of the State, would be circulated into the MOMCAS complex instead- a range of international quality and potential impact. A campus type layout would be practicable with enclosed and sheltered piazza and internal spaces, surrounded by interactive gardens with performance and family oriented outdoor spaces.

The question of individual institutions' co-operation may be raised. Given the opportunity to show their mainly unseen collections to large 'new ' communities, and subject to appropriate, additional, operational funding, it is difficult to imagine each and every Board of Trustees objecting to Government's request.

Human creativity: an idea with deep history:

Current Director of the Powerhouse Museum has recently stumbled on this key fact: in a recent address the new Director made the point that this museum is unique in Australia as a museum of arts and sciences. So, why is Sydney's Powerhouse Museum the nation's only Arts and Sciences Museum and one of very few in the world; and why is this significant within the ambit of MOMCAS?



Queen Victoria opens the Great Exhibition in The Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London, in 1851.

The background to parent institution, MAAS, is highly relevant. In London, in 1851, Prince Albert inspired the first great International Exhibition, from which evolved a museum of arts and sciences, aiming 'to make works of art available to all, to educate working people and to inspire British designers and manufacturers'. This Exhibition showcased human creativity from within the then Empire and from across the Globe. This later evolved into the Victoria and Albert Museum- the 'V&A'- while the science component was split off in the spirit of narrower specialisation as the Science Museum, in the 1920s. It was the earlier, more coherent tradition, reflecting human creativity and the nexus of art and science through design that was carried on in Sydney's Technological Museum, and which was consciously renamed the 'Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences' in 1946, honouring the unique breadth and historical inspiration of its collections.



Steve Jobs with I-Phone at the launch

The fusion of arts and sciences has become even more relevant over recent years. The growth of computers and other technology presented through inspired design- as personified by Steve Jobs of Apple fame- means innovation has become even more

accessible to the consumer thus changing our lives in profound ways. The innovator of the future will be the one who combine ideas from many disciplines which are then mediated through great design, resting still within the original inspired vision of the V and A. And resting, also, within the critical ambit of our deliberate celebration and stimulation of human creativity. Only through this will our present challenges be solved.

MAAS already leads in multidisciplinary endeavours and seeks 'to more effectively engage with the multiple communities with interest in the hybrid disciplines of the applied arts and sciences' (MAAS Annual Report, 2014-5).

Thus it must be emphasised that the Powerhouse is an unique national asset. It must be seen not as a Sydney institution which is to be placed in the city's current geographic centre which will continue to move westwards over time as it develops multiple hubs like other world cities, but as something that must remain in the most accessible place for the nation, and indeed for the world. The Ultimo site is next to the CBD at the established transport focus: visitors may walk along the recently created Goods Line Walk, from Central Station, passing some of Sydney's most important cultural, educational, innovation and media institutions, such as the ABC, UTS and TAFE to reach the museum. This is the ideal place for this unique museum and far more accessible than Parramatta to key visitor segments.

Options and constraints:

'Moving' the Powerhouse Museum (PhM) - in one way this pretends to be a fine proposal: world class embodiment of the Creative Industries, social history and technology moves west. In another it is plagued with issues relating to size, cost blow-out (total project cost \$1 billion?), complexity, time to be taken, site selection, wastage of investment, heritage destruction, reduced popular access and denudation of the edge of Darling Harbour, which will lose its major cultural institution just as the State takes an equally major initiative worth \$ billions; and as the PhM has concrete plans to re-orientate towards the renewed Darling Harbour with already increased access.

The size issue is paramount- PhM has massive 'kit'- planes, trains, cars, trucks, steam engines - which require a site footprint in excess of at least six acres; going on West Australia's new museum complex- though it lacks the big 'kit'- the PhM's replacement cost will be in excess of A\$ 600 million; it will waste at least \$ 200 million of existing purpose-built, structural investment; and it will probably take around 8-10 years to complete the project. Thus, some of the largest, yet most sensitive objects weigh many tonnes and occupy very large cubic volumes such as the 1785 Boulton and Watt beam engine (an international icon of priceless value), the other steam engines (all using live steam), the First Locomotive and Train in NSW, and the Catalina, the largest suspended aircraft in the world. Claims that the PhM has the skill sets to move these and -the other 498,000 objects- misses the fact that continued efficiency dividends have stripped out the skills required as a result of a halving of staff levels and a loss of centuries of curatorial expertise. Added to which the specialist from UK who was critical to safe movement in the 1980s is no longer with us.



Massive original Boiler Hall, unique in Australia as a huge display hall for the integrated history of world transport

Building new structures to show and store these and many other large items will be cost prohibitive and that was why the huge heritage buildings of the original Ultimo Power Station-developed originally in three stages and powering early Sydney's growth- were utilised. In addition it is probable that a legal challenge may be taken up if these heritage buildings are to be destroyed, or deeply altered to facilitate dense urban development, while the move completely confuses the visiting public due to branding confusion: what is a 'moved' historic Power House when buildings at the brand's core have been wantonly destroyed? And if the Powerhouse Museum is not 'moved' and the new museum is referred to as MAAS- what on earth is a MAAS? It does not have the intuitive brand recognition of MOCA, MONA or MOMA which are widely understood around the world. MOMCA or MOMCAS are within that broader brand understanding. MAAS is not.

Yet these negative factors, in a way, are not the weakest aspect of the proposal. The idea itself lacks a compelling intellectual justification for such major expenditure. Instead of a recycled place, does not GWS deserve something brilliant, new, creative and unique to match its rapidly evolving special character? If Government is to commit hundreds of A\$ millions should there not be something more inspiring to the people of GWS than a recycled concept from the '80's gussied up in C21 dress but squeezed into a garment four sizes too small?

Existing Co-operation with great upside:

Already three of the Big Eight are cooperating behind the scenes at the PhM's Castle Hill site with a new Storage, Discovery and upgraded Conservation facility at a cost of approximately \$32 million. This is the rebooted facility- the Discovery Centre. Started in January, 2015 this upgraded facility now brings together collections of PhM, AM, and SLM. Already, they represent a new partnership between these three. They also represent something else: the first place in mainland Australia where creative human thought of the past spanning much of human discovery, knowledge and human endeavour is concentrated in one location with access to world-class collections from individual institutions. As a range of subjects this covers off significant parts of the subject and science known as 'Human Creativity', plus major segments of natural creativity as evidenced in the work and collections of the Australian Museum.

Imagine if this new reality was taken further.

The ~Museum of Migration, Creativity, Art and Science “(MOMCAS).

This is a 'working title' only but it partly embodies what this new grouping of institutions might become. Think for a moment if the collections, creative skills, management capacities and ideas of the Big Eight- now added to with Music (Conservatorium) and the Royal Botanic Gardens- could be brought together in an entirely new fusion of talent, creativity, planning and construction? Located in Parramatta, or at least somewhere easy to access from all GWS, partnered with local higher learning entities and cultural community groups, this institution covering creativity's entire spectrum could embody Australian and multicultural communities' creativity in all the arts, humanities and sciences and our core multicultural history.

Thus it would also house a new Migration Museum, a new Museum of NSW (as separate but interlinked entities)- and a new version of Ireland's 'Science Gallery' to appeal to the 'lost generation' of young women and young men aged from 15 to 25 years. This model which combines science and art in a cutting-edge fashion- so revolutionary and fresh which has developed in Dublin and is now coming to Melbourne in 2018- should find another iconic Australian home in Parramatta. Partnered with the proposed new science centre at UWS, this facility would round out the offerings of a new cultural precinct greater than that found in Melbourne's CBD and far more exciting. Past, present and future intertwined. Deeply respectful of the traditional owners and the vibrant, yet historical qualities redolent in Parramatta's unique migrant history. Linked to a new kind of interactive garden with outdoor performance spaces, this cultural nexus could respond to and stimulate the cultural expressions and aspirations of all the communities in Greater Western Sydney. In so doing it would capture the natural environment, climatic and recreational future alongside soaring, brilliant new iconic buildings and spaces. Welcoming yet inspiring.



An intellectual as well as cultural basis?

There is now a well-developed 'Science of Creativity' subject, around fifty years old, whose experts are available from universities and other bodies, medical and research. MOMCAS could also assist in enhancing the creativity of visitors as they engage with exhibits illustrating the past, present and sustainable, creative future of our species. This is no idle claim- a pilot project in California for a wealthy private Foundation in the 1990's demonstrated this intriguing, interactive aspect of an museum enhancing creativity- and the subject has moved on a great deal since then (documentation available).



Just as MONA (Museum of New and Old Art) in Hobart has electrified the tourism for Hobart and Tasmania, so MOMCAS can do for GWS. MOMCAS would also house world-class performance spaces, innovation ateliers and could host a significant proportion of the 'Big Nine' collections. It would need far less physical space, at grade, than the PhM, yet could be a world-class architectural feature for the Region- designed and developed after an International competition. Imagine a field including our own best architects, and Lords Foster and Rogers and Frank Gehry? That would get international media's attention.

A new Cultural Icon- world class and fresh:

Instead of being a pastiche of a 1980's entity, recycled and reduced in scope, Greater Western Sydney and Parramatta can have something entirely new, created just for GWS and at a fraction of the cost of moving the Powerhouse Museum. Think \$350 million not \$600 million plus. Think five years not eight or ten. Think no wastage of already operating high quality assets. Think fund-raising based on an entirely new, dynamic concept appealing to major Corporations, successful start-ups and individuals.

Think also a unified presentation of some of the gems of all the 'Big Nine' major cultural collections supported by an in-house team, in part made up of the brightest and best of each institution seconded for five year contracts, based on a competitive selection process.



Imagine the performing arts facilities, interactive science labs, innovation workshops, design studios, and broader, multicultural educational spaces/programmes available for enjoyment, entertainment and life-long learning. Added to which would be commercial spaces and a gallery- perhaps a western home for AGNSW- a popular market, flexible theatres, installation spaces, many available as popular venues for hire filled with fashion and commercial launches, all much easier for an operation which has no responsibility for managing and funding heritage collections. Underpinned by a 'Creativity Research Institute' partnered with universities and bodies of learning. Commercial links and a selection of local start-ups, designers, construction companies, suppliers and experts can infuse a major economic as well as cultural benefit to GWS. The linked, yet independent ***institutions*** could be structured as subsidiaries of a non-profit corporation, part commercial part NGO, able to charge fees where appropriate and possibly a sub-unit of the main Public Service sector, with varied terms and conditions which can facilitate secondment and also direct employment to streamline industrial relations.

In addition, the facility, if provided with enough land, could also have unique gardens - 'Gardens of the Mind'- which could access the world class collections of Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens which has a major facility in the West at Mount Annan. The 'Gardens of the Mind' concept, based on the notion of interactivity and specific heritage gardens around the world, underpinned by both art and science to include landscape architecture, horticulture and hydrology, was proved up in the mid-'90's in California at the Milken Family Foundation. Outdoor performance spaces are central to popular visitation as are areas specifically devoted to interactive family learning partnered with picnicking and gentle sports (boules anyone? Super-size chess?). Outline plans are available if there is any interest in this integrated concept.

All buildings and facilities in this precinct or campus would embody sustainable engineering and architecture- an aspect of human creativity focused on our global future. These notions were widely explored in the California project.

By including Sydney's Botanic Gardens all of the ten great Cultural Institutions could be embraced and brought to the West in a unique new concept housed in world class new buildings which will cost less than a moved Powerhouse Museum because their scale will necessarily be less.

Such a unique fusion, in a unique site and building complex, would answer the criticism of 'who from the Cruise Ships and International tourist groups will bother to go out West?'. Using the ferries along the Parramatta river (just as in London with the new Tate Modern building housed in an old power station, and in Hobart at MONA), and upgraded road and rail, plus eventual tourists from the second international airport at Badgerys Creek, if the project is creative enough people will turn up in droves. Who ever thought of going to the rust bucket City of Bilbao before the Guggenheim or Ultimo before the Powerhouse Museum and Darling Harbour were recreated?

Surely a market study and wide consultation, linked to a full options research project, oversights by an expert panel will provide concrete answers to such questions?



Everett children's adventure and interactive garden, New York Botanical Gardens

Greater Western Sydney- the opportunity and the options:

As Minister for Western Sydney, our Premier has created a working hypothesis based on demographic and political reality- GWS deserves a world-class focus for its creative cultures. This proposal, at lower cost, smaller site size, faster speed, greater originality, enhanced 'Big Ten' co-operation, and exemplary uniqueness would demonstrate this Government's own creative thinking while capitalising on existing collections, strengths and synergies. An innovative 'Museum of Migration, Creativity, Art and Science' MOMCAS, would have as great, if not greater international impact than Hobart's MONA and would indelibly validate the Government's claim to truly support Greater Western Sydney and Parramatta as an International Centre with world-class cultural and educational opportunities.

Revised cultural policy, supported by an independently researched options report oversights by an independent panel, will assist Government in planning a properly based project, consonant with its evolving cultural policy and evolving major projects.

Recommendation:

That the Premier requires an independent, consultative Committee explore this and other options and report back within five months.

NB: If use of the word 'Creativity' is seen as too ephemeral, it could have 'Design' substituted-

'Museum of Migration, Design, Arts and Science' - MOMDAS.