

CELEBRATION OF THE NEW AUSTRALIA COUNCIL PREMISES - ADRIAN COLLETTE

26 September 2019

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Celebration of the new Australia Council premises

Adrian Collette AM, CEO.

Australia Council for the Arts

I'd like to welcome you all here to Australia Council's new home.

Herbert Cole Coombs, better known as Nugget, economist, public servant, boy from the bush, first Governor of the Reserve Bank, when he became the Australia Council for the Arts first chair in the early 1960s, talked boldly about the Council's civic purpose.

'Artists expressed our national identity', he said, and the Council would have a central role to play in an increasingly prosperous nation, investing not only in great art, but in social understanding and tolerance (our first Chair took no issue relating intrinsic artistic merit with economic prosperity and civic purpose).

And importantly, right from the start, the support and promotion of indigenous art was central to the Council's legislated purpose.

Contemporary Australia is an unfathomably more complex place than in the 1960s. But I think the value of the Australia Council, when it is working at its best, is pretty much as Nugget Coombs described it: it should be a strongly civic-minded organisation, supporting artists as they challenge and give expression to our cultural understanding and identity.

This is our fourth home in over 50 years.

The first was in North Sydney in 1975 (before then, the various art form boards met, but not under one roof). We then moved south to Redfern in 1985. A few steps north to Surry Hills in 1999. And from there to our wonderful new home here in Pyrmont.

Over the years our homes have hosted significant events, impassioned debates, celebrations and robust discussions. They have borne witness to moments of great joy and bitter disappointments, as our society and cultural sector has evolved over time. And Pyrmont will be no different. Because the work we will do here matters.

It matters to us. It matters to Australia's artists. And it matters to the public. To all Australians. And this move couldn't have come at a better time.

In the very same week we moved, we launched *Creativity Connects Us*. We hope this strategy will move the arts into a new space. A public and creative space big enough, inclusive enough, for all Australians.

Creativity Connects Us.

It connects us with each other and who we are as Australians.

With a living culture that spans more than 70,000 years.

With our Australian community in all its glorious diversity.

With our global community.

With better social outcomes.

And more sustainable economic opportunities

While our vision is clear, our line of sight can be obscured – obscured by some persistent assumptions and narrow definitions. Our research tells us that whilst 98% of us engage with the arts, many do not connect with the arts, prevented by a sense of the arts as elitist, or 'not for me'. The arts don't have an exclusive claim to creativity – creativity is much broader than this. But creativity is the wellspring of arts

and culture - of our innate compulsion to tell stories and make meaning through creative expression - a hallmark of our humanity.

So, shifting to a shared language about 'creativity' will help.

It will broaden the conversation. It will take us outside our echo chamber, to engage more points of view - to connect with not just our sector, but the broader public, and indeed our government stakeholders – as we advocate not only for what excellent art is but for what excellent art does, as a public good.

Making this move requires more than a big vision. Our corporate priorities will organise our actions and inform our investments.

In concluding I would like to thank you all for joining us this evening to celebrate our new premises.

Adrian Collette AM