

National Museum of Australia Review
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I write unequivocally in support of the National Museum of Australia, as it stands, and Dawn Casey as its Director.

This is from experience as a regular visitor, particularly when friends visit from interstate. While I have a strong interest in the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, on reflection, I do not think I have ever gone directly there from the main entrance. Rather, it has been first through the rest of the Museum and sometimes that has proved so interesting that the Aboriginal Gallery has had to be left for another time.

The comment is often made by visitors, that there is so much to see that more time is needed than is usually available. This is also my own experience. I know that with each visit something new is discovered. I know also there are areas I have not yet seen, such as the ground floor level of the first galleries, except for the display on the architectural design of the Museum building itself. There are also displays that need time for more detailed study such as bringing up the full range of environmental data available on the map of Australia near the start of the Crimson Thread of Kinship display. Another case in point would be the displays of bark painting on the ground floor of the Aboriginal Gallery that had an involvement of Howard Morphy. His Phaedon Press publication on Aboriginal art is so informative, one needs to have that in one hand while looking at the material.

What I point to is satisfaction with what is found in the Museum. This includes, as shared by visitors, delight in the striking architecture. Another thing is that there is a strong impression of both Australian and Aboriginal Australian cultures being alive and living and it is not just one glass case after another of the past. This seems to me to be one aspect that is a vindication of the Government's vision in approving funding for the institution.

I find the Charter of the Museum useful in that it makes more specific the functions outlined in Section 6(1) of the Act, and again feel that the Museum has been successfully implementing both the Act and the Charter to the extent of available resources. If one looked to the future it would be for funding that would more fully implement the vision of the Piggott Report. At the moment, that vision of three distinctive but related museums has been shrunk into one small institution.

The Terms of Reference of the Inquiry speak of examining the aims and content of the Museum's exhibitions. If this means commenting on individual displays or the selection of particular exhibits, then I would say, as a general member of the public, I was not qualified to speak on such matters. They come within the professional expertise of museum curators and as part of the skilled task of presentation. To do so would be like telling the National Library how it should do its cataloging, the War Memorial how it should present its dioramas, the National Portrait Gallery what constitutes a portrait, the National Gallery how it should hang its pictures and what to put into an exhibition, and telling the National Archives how it should describe its holdings.

Having mentioned these other peer institutions, I would conclude by saying that none of these have been faced with a public Review and they have been operating for much longer than the mere two years of the National Museum of Australia.

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