

I am the mother of two young children, aged 2 and 4, who are both very much enamoured of the National Museum of Australia. Except for the opportunity to visit the blockbuster exhibit, Leunig and the political cartoonists, I have only ever come to the museum with my children, restricting my viewpoint. I have also only recently begun to make use of this facility (my first visit was in Sept 02), however, I have been a regular visitor since then. The comments I wish to make in regards to the review of the National Museum of Australia are coloured by this background, and focus particularly on how the museum is seen by my children.

* The Friends of the Museum value-add considerably to the NMA's programs and exhibitions. In particular, their "Story Time" and "Playlunch with friends" for the under-5 age groups is a way of making the museum accessible and valuable to a part of the population which is otherwise often ignored by museums.

The many other programs offered by the Museum in addition to the exhibits are excellent examples of the ways in which the themes of the museum can be interpreted, and are clearly tied in to the existing exhibits - Noni Hazelhurst (Playschool), Mem Fox, various puppetry plays (the land and environment), bush tucker, Australian colloquial language, and children's animated films are some of the events we have attended in the last 6 months.

* The museum offers a diverse range of exhibits suited to almost every age group (not all of which I have yet had the opportunity to view) which draw the visitor in through their stories and allows them to seek further knowledge where necessary.

* The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Gallery is very confronting as a white Australian. However, this is not a bad thing, and it is fitting that such a gallery should present the stories of the indigenous peoples. The many interactive elements in the gallery make it possible to translate these complex and difficult themes to young children. In particular, the humpy and the children's footprints are useful in this regard.

* In my studies for the Graduate Diploma of Education at the University of Canberra, I recommended to the lecturer of "Diversity in Educational Settings" (a course which focuses heavily on issues such as the construction of history and its impact on indigenous populations of Australia) that she refer the students to this gallery because it reflected many of the stories she was trying to convey.

* The variety of presentation techniques used through the skilful use of technologies in the Museum is staggering. In this age of multi-media, this is a fantastic demonstration of what is possible. Circa - an absolute favourite with the kids - is a showcase of brilliant technology! Even better, the use of that technology, in Circa and elsewhere throughout the museum, is integral and fitting to the purpose.

* There can be no doubt from the statistics of actual and projected numbers of visitors to the Museum which the Friends read out at a recent meeting that the general population is very satisfied with what the Museum has achieved in its two years of existence. (Of course, there is always room for improvement, but it should be borne in mind what has been achieved in a short time. Nevertheless, creating explicit ties to other museums or library collections whose work complements the Museums would be an improvement. The planned relocation of the Museum's library to on-site will also be an improvement.)

* Having read the Act and heard the Charter of the Museum read at a recent meeting, I have no doubt that for the reasons stated above, plus many more which I cannot articulate, the Museum has complied with those documents. It has also made exceptional use of the funding provided, albeit a small figure in contrast with many other Museums. Further funding will ensure that the vision can be continued and furthered.

* As an institution which focuses not only on the themes of what has become "Land, Nation, People", but also on the relationship of these in the past, present and future of Australia, I cannot say enough about how valuable its exhibits and programmes are for enabling my children to begin to grasp these concepts. After all, my children are some of those who constitute not only the present, but the future, and whose ideas will help to shape future directions.

* Finally, I want to reiterate the essential and wonderful job of the Friends in helping the Museum to be a success and meet its aims and requirements.

Thankyou for this opportunity to have a say. I trust that the review will come to a positive conclusion about the Museum as my children and I would be very sad to see any major change in its direction.

Sincerely,

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