

SUBMISSION TO COMMITTEE OF REVIEW ON EXHIBITIONS AND PUBLIC  
PROGRAMS AT THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA

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Background

I am grateful for the committee's invitation to this interview. As the members will know, I have been a historical advisor to the NMA for about four years. I was invited to join the group of historians who had been advising the museum late in 1999 and took part in discussions with the Council of the designs for exhibits that were then being developed for Acton Peninsula. At about that time and early in 2000 I read and commented, sometimes quite critically, on many thousands of words of label text. The museum was working against very tight deadlines for the opening and each batch of text had to be turned around in three or four days. While I questioned a few labels that seemed to reflect forms of political bias, the majority of comments I made were about minor factual errors, lack of sufficient explanation and flat or garbled language. I specifically declined to examine text from the Gallery of First Australians, since I considered Aboriginal history to be a specialised field beyond my expertise. When David Barnett made criticisms of some labels, I was asked by the Chair of the Museum Council, Tony Staley to examine them. With a few exceptions I found most of his criticisms to be without foundation.

With other historical advisors, especially Geoffrey Bolton and John Mulvaney, I suggested to the council that it was not appropriate for its members, who were generally not expert in the fields of inquiry covered by the museum, to attempt to 'micro-manage' such issues as labelling. It should instead formulate general policy on the content and process of historical interpretation, leaving the Director to ensure that an appropriate balance was achieved. Accordingly I was invited to draft some guidelines on 'content' - the word used in the museum to refer to subject matter and

interpretation. In drafting this document I attempted to balance 'inspirational' or patriotic values, with critical and reflective ones; the need for the museum to entertain its visitors with the need to educate and provide information. The guidelines also emphasise that exhibits should observe strict standards of factual accuracy and should be based on the highest standards of scholarship. Discussion of this document proceeded more or less in parallel with the discussion of labels. David Barnett drafted a set of guidelines of his own, and later made a series of objections to the guidelines I had drafted. Christopher Pearson was asked to come and discuss these with me to see if we could draft an agreed version. We each made some concessions but were unable to agree on some points, especially my proposal that the museum should 'challenge' its visitors to reflect on the past. With the support of Bolton and Mulvaney, I declined the suggestion that a weaker verb - eg 'invite' - should be used. Our concern was that weakening this language would amount to a conscious departure from the principles of the Piggott Report which had envisaged a museum that could be controversial and might 'stimulate legitimate doubt and thoughtful discussion'. In order to allay Pearson's apparent concern that the word 'challenge' was subversive of legitimate authority, and to make explicit our link to Piggott, we proposed the insertion of a sentence from his report, and in this form the guidelines were approved by Council.

These transactions have naturally influenced my response to the decision to review the museum's exhibits and public programs. If the review's recommendations are to find broad acceptance in the public domain, and especially among scholars, I believe that the committee will need to give unequivocal endorsement to the underlying principles that have guided the museum since its inception. I turn to these principles below. As I have said publicly on a number of occasions, however, I do not regard the museum's exhibits as being above criticism, although I think its most serious shortcomings are not primarily matters of ideology. While I am happy to discuss the events of the past four years, I think it may be more useful to address some of the broader issues now facing the museum.

#### Terms of Reference

The Committee is required to report on the NMA's performance in relation to its Act, in relation to the government's 'vision' at the time authorisation was given to proceed

with the Acton Peninsula building, and with regard to any possible changes in the Act. I regard the first and third of these as entirely proper matters for review; but I am both mystified and disturbed by the implication of the second: namely, that the museum's performance should be assessed in relation to a criterion that, so far as I know, has never been publicly expressed, and, in any case, may not have the broad, non-partisan acceptance that is appropriate as a basis for an institution that must take a long-term national view of its role. I am also concerned that the terms of reference imply a largely retrospective and forensic approach to the review. There are many aspects of the museum's exhibition and public programs that are not directly governed by its Act, and might not be improved by changes in the Act. I have been assured by the Chair of the Committee that he intends to take a broad interpretation of its terms of reference, and is interested in how the museum's exhibitions and public programs might be improved as much as in carrying out an inquisition into its past performance. The following remarks are offered in the spirit of that assurance.

#### Expectations and Constraints

The National Museum of Australia is, by world standards, a relatively small museum with a quite short history. Although the idea of a national museum has had some currency since the early days of the Commonwealth - and perhaps earlier if Henry Parkes's plan for a State House of New South Wales is included - the institution itself has come into existence only in the past 25-30 years since the Piggott Report of 1975. For much of that time, it was only a museum-in-waiting, with very slender budget for collections and a skeleton staff. I recall visiting the museum on several occasions in the 1980s and early 1990s when it was a little more than a campsite on Yarramundi Reach. Without slighting the present staff, who have worked often heroically to bring the new institution into existence, I suspect that the long period of gestation made it hard for the museum to attract professional staff of the very highest calibre. It sits in the national capital alongside what is arguably THE national museum of Australia, the Australian War Memorial, with about five times as much space, a much larger staff and budget, and nearly 80 years of collecting behind it. It must also compete for visitors political support with the NGA, the Australian Portrait Gallery, ScreenSound Australia, the National Science Centre, the National Archives of Australia, the National Library and a number of other national institutions, each with exhibiting

programs, in Canberra. Yet it bears the proud but daunting title of THE National Museum of Australia. It sits prominently by the lake on the last great monumental site in Canberra, a sitting duck for critics. Politicians and the public expect much - perhaps too much - of an institution that is as yet in its swaddling clothes.

None of this is to offer excuses for poor performance or to suggest that standards should be lowered, but rather to draw attention to a key developmental issues. Most of the great museums, including the Australian state museums, had a long period as collecting and research institutions before they faced the much larger expectations of mass visitation, public programs, electronic outreach etc that now largely define the modern museum. Even in an electronic era, great iconic objects and rich collections remain the big drawcards of most museums. Museums inevitably play to their strengths. The NMA, which has a large remit to exhibit Australian Aboriginal culture, simply doesn't have the great collections of the Australian Museum, the Museum of Victoria or the South Australian Museum. The first thing that needs to be done for the NMA is to develop its collections. This will require a combination of increased funds, sensible collection policies, astute and far-sighted curatorial decisions, some enterprising 'star' acquisitions and more patience than governments and public critics have been inclined to allow it so far. The museum also needs to develop its expertise and research capacity, both through hiring and training up a cohort of outstanding professional staff, and by drawing upon the expertise of the wider scholarly community. I find the current practice of describing the museum's expert staff as 'content managers' rather than 'curators' or 'researchers' curious. It tends to subordinate the process of intellectual leadership to a management model, and assimilate the process of generating and disseminating knowledge to the manipulation of 'content'.

### The National Role

It seems self-evident to most people that a national museum should have as its major purpose projecting the identity of the nation itself. Most of the great national museums, from the Smithsonian Institution to the recently opened National Museum of Scotland, now assume that role. Many of the increasing number of international visitors to our museums are also in search of exhibitions that crystallise a sense of national distinctiveness. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere (Davison, 2003b,

forthcoming) the ascription of the word 'national' to state cultural institutions did not originally have such implications. Museums and art galleries were national by virtue of their civic and educative role, not because of their exclusively or distinctively national content. Polar bears and British steam engines belonged in our national museums just as much as stuffed wombats and stump-jump ploughs. By focusing the NMA around themes of Land and People, the Piggott Report brought national concerns into sharper focus. Its concern with the land-people relationship reflected broader currents of thought in the mid-1970, as well as the personal interests of its two principal authors, John Mulvaney who had recently published A Prehistory of Australia, and Geoffrey Blainey who had just published Triumph of the Nomads and was about to write A Land Half Won.

It was not until the early 1980s, under the first Hawke government, that the Nation Gallery was added to the museum's blueprint. I recall thinking at the time that this was appropriate - it seemed only natural that a museum located in the seat of the national government should focus on the history of the nation-state. Since the museum was also too poor to acquire many objects from its own budget, it could rely on occasional gifts from other government institutions. A good proportion of the exhibits in the Nation Gallery, such as the ABC Television van, came by this route. Introducing issues of political identity, however, probably brought some political risks. The Australian War Memorial, of course, does have such an explicit nationalising role; but its central narrative theme, the Anzac Legend, enjoys a broad consensus, even if it is understood differently by different constituencies. The problem for the NMA is that its main themes, which seemed inclusive enough in the 1970s, became increasingly contested during the 1980s and 1990s. The debates that erupted in the months preceding and following the opening of the museum were, in part at least, a consequence of the breaking down of that consensus. The divisions between Aboriginal activists and their critics, and between 'Light Green' and 'Dark Green' environmentalists were the main axes of division.

How then should the NMA now approach its national role? In particular, how should an institution charged with the responsibility of representing the nation's history to a national audience deal with divisions of scholarly and popular opinion? In an earlier

paper (Davison, 2001) I considered five alternative positions among those engaged in current debates, both here and overseas:

1. The national museum should exhibit a stirringly patriotic version of the national past, designed to send visitors away with a spring in their steps and a song in their hearts. Museums should exhibit iconic objects associated with national heroes and important events and should reinforce a sense of the special virtues of the (Australian) or (American, British, etc) people. Some recent developments at the Smithsonian Institution appear to reflect such a view. The problem about museums designed along these lines is not that they are uninteresting, but that they risk disenfranchising those not included, and that in a global environment, where outsiders are constantly becoming insiders, and vice versa, it is harder to make such displays plausible.

2. A second view, more likely to come from the curatorial staff, including Indigenous and other minorities, is that a national museum should aim to challenge and disturb, to redress the sins of the past by exposing them to visitors who may never have previously confronted them. The Holocaust Museums in Jerusalem and in Melbourne are well-known international and local examples. A mature nation, the advocates of such museums argue, is capable of confronting the bad as well as the good in its past. The potential danger of such an approach is that, in a national museum especially, it risks alienating an audience more interested in being amused than in being moralised. Not every kind of national task is ideally suited to a museum. I am also impressed by research (Doering, 2002) suggesting that the capacity of museums exhibits to change people's attitudes to historical issues is very limited; people largely see what they expect to see and filter their impressions in accordance with well-formed attitudes.

3. Abdication. The difficulties of resolving these conflicts persuades some observers to a third position – that the day of the national museum has passed. Since consensus about the national past is no longer possible, governments should not attempt to impose one under official auspices, but leave the

business of representing national history to private enterprise or voluntary effort. But will Disney or Sovereign Hill offer a more satisfactory version of the national past than a national museum? And, in an age of mass tourism, when national capitals are important destinations, can national governments afford to get out of the national museum business completely? There may be a case, however, for placing rather less emphasis on the NMA's role in defining national identity, and rather more on its broadly educative role in stimulating thought on issues of national significance, whether the exhibition content is Australian or not.

4. Consensus. Museum boards and managers often seek to mediate the contradictory expectations of staff, boards and patrons by establishing a consensus between them. Strongly critical or strongly patriotic statements are eliminated or toned down, tally sheets of positive or negative elements are kept, exhibits are assessed according to criteria of gender balance, ethnic diversity, regional representation. Walking around some museums you can almost reconstruct the compromises that shaped them. Everyone has been consulted, everyone is represented, and the result, all too often, is bland and uninspiring.

5. Pluralism. Rather than suppressing difference by imposing a single authorial vision, or brokering an institutional consensus, the NMA might better begin with the assumption that the imagined community we call the nation is by its very nature plural and in flux. In practice, the degree of difference should not be exaggerated; there are many topics of high interest on which there is a substantial consensus of opinion. A national museum might then expect to play host to several interpretations of the national past, stirring patriotic as well as critical, educationally demanding as well as entertaining. A national gallery has no difficulty in exhibiting the work of artists with different views of the world, and a national broadcasting system may do much the same; why should the same principles not be followed in the national museum?

### Pluralism in Practice

In a democratic country where people of good will and scholars of ability and integrity hold to a range of views about the national past, national institutions like the NMA seem to me to be bound to embrace a policy of interpretative pluralism. To recognise such differences as an empirical and political reality is not, as some critics suggest, to embrace the postmodernist position that 'there is no such thing as historical truth', or that one historian's views of the past are no better than another's. The NMA should insist on empirical accuracy and scholarly expertise as basic criteria for all its exhibits and public programs. Rigorously applying these criteria may narrow the range of views that the museum will regard as worthy of serious consideration, but it will not eliminate such differences altogether, since interpretations will be influenced by personal values, disciplinary expertise, and a range of other considerations.

If pluralism is to be the policy, the museum will require procedures to ensure:

1. that it offers a genuine and balanced range of views;
2. that those who are responsible for interpretations are publicly identified and capable of being praised or criticised for their work;
3. that the sources or authorities on which these interpretations rely are available to the interested inquirer;
4. that the museum offers ample opportunity for public discussion of the issues raised by its exhibits and public programs.

The NMA's practices already incorporate some of these procedures, but it could do more. Ensuring that the range of views presented is sufficiently balanced is primarily a responsibility for the director, working together with the NMA's Council. The director should be a person with the scholarly background, breadth of sympathies and personal integrity to ensure that this is achieved. The Council should maintain a keen interest in the overall directions of the NMA's exhibitions and public programs, offering its advice to the director, but it should not attempt to 'micro-manage' the museum by intervening directly in detailed issues of interpretation.



Although I understand the Council of the NMA authorised publication of the names of individual contributors to its exhibitions on its website, this information does not appear to routinely posted. Some professional staff appear to prefer a policy of corporate authorship and personal anonymity; perhaps fearing that being known may subject them to political pressure or discrimination. Others make a distinction between temporary exhibitions, where the team members may be named publicly, and permanent ones, where they are not. Privately, most museum professionals acknowledge that developing a museum involves personal judgements in selection and interpretation. On balance, the benefits of openness, for both professional staff and museum visitors, seem to outweigh the costs. By publicly acknowledging and reviewing the originators of exhibitions, we may also help to reinforce a culture of professional peer review and excellence in the Australian museum community.

Most exhibitions rest upon much more substantial research than can be summarised in the 50 or so words of an exhibition label. Many visitors, as I observed in relation to the much-discussed 'Bell's Falls' exhibition (Davison, 2003a), would like to know more than the labels tell them. While the NMA has done some excellent work in publishing ancillary materials for schools, much more could be done to provide ancillary material either in printed form or on its website answering the kinds of detailed questions that visitors are likely to ask about its exhibitions. Websites are now becoming the almost obligatory gateway to museums. Many visitors consult them before they visit, or after they leave. Many others are only 'virtual visitors' who consult the museums' website, often from overseas, even though they may never come in person. By the standards of other Australian museums, the NMA website is creditable; but it falls short of the most outstanding international ones. The overviews of the main galleries serve to give the 'visitor' a good grasp of their contents, but do not offer access to a deeper layer of research on the subjects. I recommend that the NMA devote significant resources to enriching the content of its website, especially deepening the level of well-researched data and establishing links with other relevant sites.

The NMA has been active since its inception in developing public programs such as broadcasts, conferences and publications. It has some exciting new exhibition proposals under development, such as the international exhibition on bandits and the cooperative exhibition with the National Gallery of Victoria on 'Beauty'

### The Permanent Exhibitions

The Review Committee will have ample opportunity to make up its own mind about the quality of the NMA's permanent exhibitions, so I propose to make only limited comment here. It will have noted the generally very favorable responses of visitors to the NMA's own questionnaires and the positive tone of most press comment. While this evidence cannot provide assurance on all the matters under review, such as historical accuracy for example, it does suggest that the lack of political balance that some critics discern is invisible to most visitors.

If I have criticisms of the permanent exhibitions, they relate more to issues of 'navigability', intellectual coherence and narrative power. In my judgement, the most satisfactory galleries are 'Tangled Destinies' and the 'Gallery of First Australians', though their best qualities are very different. Horizons is perhaps the least satisfactory, although people who stay to listen to the first-person immigrant narratives seem to enjoy them greatly. 'Nation' seems to me to lack the coherence needed for a relatively small exhibition, though some elements that I recall questioning during the development phase, such as the lexicographical exhibit on Australian words ('Why make an exhibit of something you can do better in a book?', I recall saying) actually seem to work surprisingly well. 'Eternity' is the boldest and also the most problematical. Some visitors love it; others hate it. Personally I didn't mind its frankly populist approach, or its feminist subtext; but I sometimes found the relationship between theme, object and label puzzling or arbitrary. A new museum like the NMA should be prepared to push out the boundaries of museum interpretation, but 'Eternity' does not always come off.

'Tangled Destinies' seems to me to have the most consistent historical interpretation and, though it is housed in rather narrow and constrained spaces, and the objects it has to work with are seldom large or iconic, the relationship between objects and

interpretation is satisfying. The Gallery of First Australians has the advantage of more space, and I think its primary interpretative theme - the regional diversity of Aboriginal Australia - is well sustained. People seem to find the introductory Torres Strait Islander 'dance video' uplifting and infectious. This is the gallery that has attracted most public criticism, though notably for only one small section on 'Frontier Conflict'. Since my views of this exhibit are already on record (Davison 2003a), I won't repeat them here.

#### Scope of Collections and Exhibitions

Should the future scope of the NMA's exhibitions and collections remain as they are at present, or should it seek to develop new collections in areas not currently collected or exhibited? Some areas anticipated by Piggott, such as ancient fauna and flora are not strongly represented in the NMA's collections at present. But they are also strongly represented in the main state museums, and, on balance, I am inclined to think that the scope of the museum's responsibilities is already as large as its budget, staff expertise and physical facilities allow. If the museum were to be granted a substantial increase in its resources, and new buildings, this might be reconsidered.

#### Collection Development

Museums are largely judged by the depth and quality of their collections. Even in an global age when museums are engaged in international collaborations and loans, and rely on electronic displays, the cultural power of the museum still resides in the authentic three-dimensional objects it houses and displays. The NMA has made a good beginning in developing its collections, but it has a long way to go before it can rival the best state museums, let alone the great international museums.

Confronted with this challenge, some observers suggest that the NMA should largely abandon collecting and redefine its role as that of a coordinating and exhibiting institution, drawing on the resources of the other national collections and acting as a broker in negotiating loans with other international museums. I believe that this is a flawed strategy. It is a departure from the founding principles of the museum, denies the expectations of visitors, and fails the long-term interests of the nation. We do not yet know what objects of our own time will later come to be seen as 'iconic'; the

NMA has the responsibility to develop imaginative and enterprising collection policies that will give it the chance, a century hence, to become a great repository of the nation's material heritage. Like all museums it will make mistakes: anyone who has had the chance to tour the vaults of our best museums, such as the National Gallery of Victoria, for example, knows that great works on display in the galleries represent a small proportion of the less memorable works in the collection. A museum needs a good collection of its own to become a serious player in the international collaboration that is now such a marked feature of the museum world, and its staff need to develop the curatorial, conservation and interpretative skills that can only come through developing its own collection. I hope that the Review Committee will give the highest priority to the development of financial and curatorial strategies designed to reinforce the development of the museum's collections.

Not all the museum's difficulties in this area are financial. The NMA is inhibited to some extent by its location in Canberra, and, with the exception of the Aboriginal collections, it sometimes appears to lack the strong institutional links into potential sources of collection material in other parts of the country. More could perhaps be done through the establishment of linkages with the networks of Australiana collectors, and with ethnic communities, historical societies and other bodies. I would like to see members of the museum's curatorial staff travelling frequently to other parts of the country, and encouraged to be active in establishing networks that reinforce the museums' role as an active collecting institution. The NMA might also consider retaining local experts in various parts of Australia to act on its behalf in seeking out material for its collections. I would generally prefer the museum to seek private or commercial sponsorship for the acquisition of collections than for the development of exhibitions, a practice likely to encourage a suspicion that sponsors may influence the process of interpretation.

#### Staff Development and Expertise

In spite of the often discouraging history of the past two decades, the NMA has been fortunate to attract some high calibre staff. During the lead-up to the opening of the Acton Peninsula museum, it also hired a number of short-term contract staff, many of

them enthusiastic younger scholars relatively inexperienced in museum interpretation and management. It was obliged to rely, to a large extent, on the pool of expertise already available in Canberra. Over the past few months two senior historians have moved back to full or part-time positions at the ANU. With some distinguished exceptions, Australia has yet to develop a cadre of museum professionals with the blend of scholarly, interpretative and management skills that one regularly meets in American and British museums. The dominant staff paradigm at the NMA, as in many state museums, is a management paradigm, rather than a research or scholarly paradigm. The concept of 'content managers' which appears to be intended to combine the two is an awkward one which often seems to leave people hired for their scholarly expertise unsure of their role. I am not sufficiently expert in the organisational features of the museum, or of their relationship with public service structures, to be able to recommend how these tensions should be resolved; but I think it may be desirable that some senior positions should be defined with a stronger research or creative, and a less managerial, emphasis.

Some of the museum's research needs, such as those related to its own collections, are ongoing and require the appointment of permanent staff. But others, such as those needed for the development of particular exhibitions, are short-term but demanding of a higher level of expertise than the museum's own staff can supply. Here, it seems to me, the NMA may be well advised to follow the example of many American museums in looking outside its own walls by appointing creative teams drawn from academia, other museums, private consultants and the like. It might appoint experts as short-term fellows, or engage them as consultants. I understand that the NMA already has such schemes under consideration; I strongly endorse them, not only as a means of securing high-calibre expertise at reasonable cost, but as a way of strengthening the museum's links with other constituencies.

There is a set of special interconnected issues relating to the role of Aboriginal staff in the museum. Since the 1975 Report of the Planning Committee of the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia, the NMA has sought to give special recognition to the role of Aboriginal people in conservation and interpretation as well as in other phases of the museum's work. I have been surprised, in recent public debate about the Gallery of

First Australians, how little recognition is given by critics of the museum to the cogent historical reasons for its approach to these issues. In its report, the Planning Committee of the GAA sought to strike a balance between recognition of Aboriginal perspectives and interests and the danger of what it called an 'exclusive and separatist' concept of the museum. It recommended engaging Aboriginal people in both the conservation and interpretation of their own history. And it looked forward to the time when Aboriginal people would hold positions at all levels of the museum. Although the NMA has a distinguished Aboriginal woman as its current director, it has still to reach the point where the intellectual responsibility for the interpretation of Aboriginal history and culture in the museum is carried out substantially by appropriately credentialled Aboriginal people. Until this is the case, it will be difficult for the NMA to achieve what the designers of the GAA called 'Aboriginal participation in and collaboration with our common Australian heritage'. (p12). I hope that the Review Committee will offer practical suggestions on ways in which the expertise of Aboriginal professional staff can be further developed and recognised within the museum.

### Research

In recent years the NMA has been conspicuously successful in seeking collaborative research funding through ARC Linkage Grants and other funding mechanisms. It has sought stronger research links especially with the Humanities Research Centre. These are valuable initiatives that should be encouraged and strengthened.

### Buildings and Facilities

The NMA inhabits a striking building on one of the best sites in Canberra. But a building, however magnificent, is only an envelope for the real museum which consists of its people and collections. While the qualities of the NMA's building are not a primary subject of your examination, it is impossible to review its exhibitions and public programs without some attention to the physical setting in which they are located. As I have already observed, expectations of what the NMA should be doing are necessarily framed by the relatively small size and very constrained spaces of the Acton Peninsula building. Ideally, I believe, the museum should have been designed with a much higher ratio of more flexible exhibition space, suitable either for more

temporary exhibitions or easier rotation and development of its permanent exhibitions. Some of the limitations of the museum's' permanent exhibition, such as the 'Horizons' gallery, seem to me to derive in large part from the constrained space in which it is located. So do some of the confusing and dissonant features of other sections, for example in 'Nation'. Of the main galleries, only the Gallery of First Australians seems quite satisfactory from a physical point of view. Most of the others seem more crowded and confusing than is really desirable. Within the next half decade the NMA will probably have to turn its energies to renovating its permanent exhibitions and possibly increasing the space for temporary exhibitions. Some piecemeal renovation of the permanent exhibitions should probably be commenced immediately, but some, such as the Horizons Gallery, might require a more comprehensive review. The museum should be moving soon, if it has not already done so, to develop a sequence for the review and renovation of its main exhibitions and exhibition spaces. While the Committee of Review might wish to express a view about the way in which this might proceed, the plan itself is probably best left to the museum's own professional staff.

### Conclusion

Building and opening a major museum on time and on-budget has been a major achievement, for which the NMA and its staff deserve congratulations. But the stresses of that process, especially the tensions between the museum staff and its council, reinforced by the public controversy of the past year, have not been helpful to the development of institutional morale. In these circumstances it is important, I believe, for your Committee to approach its task as constructively as possible. There are probably a number of features of the museum, such as the architecture of its building, which could be fairly criticised, but which are beyond the power of the NMA to alter, at least for the present. There may be others areas in which the museum falls short of the ideal, but has lacked the time and resources to do better. Above all, I urge you to take a long view of the museum's prospects, and support policies that will enable it to sink the deep foundations in collection and research that alone will enable it to mount the exhibitions and public programs befitting a truly national museum.