



*The Australian National University*

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The Manager,  
NMA Review Secretariat,  
Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts,  
Canberra.

Dear Ms Harrison,

I have visited the National Museum of Australia often, usually with visitors from other states or overseas. Without exception they share my delight in the exhibitions, permanent and temporary. Like other contemporary museums of social history, the exhibits offer a variety of perspectives and opinions, encouraging viewers to engage in issues. In this respect the NMA diverges from the older tradition of telling viewers precisely what to think about the items on display. The National Museum of India for example, and the National Museum of China provide a very explicit commentary on the nature, direction and meaning of those countries' histories, defying viewers to form any other point of view.

I am therefore disappointed that some commentators criticise precisely the quality that makes the NMA most engaging to its many visitors. And I am dismayed to discover that the review panel includes no social historians despite the fact that this is a museum of social history, and includes neither Aboriginal nor Torres Strait Islander members although it is the Aboriginal content of the NMA which has provoked the greatest interest.

I have no doubt that the Museum has "complied with its role and functions as set out in the National Museum of Australia Act 1980". Whether "the Government's vision ...has been realised" is open to doubt; but I must ask if this is an appropriate question to ask. The National Museums of India and China implement their governments' visions faithfully - which is why very few people bother to visit them, and those who do visit learn nothing new.

Yours sincerely,

Donald Denoon