

The NMA Secretariat  
Department of Communications Information Technology and the Arts  
GPO Box 2154  
Canberra ACT

24 February 2003

The National Museum of Australia is an institution of which all Australians can be proud. As behoves a museum opening in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it embraces contemporary museological practice. Visitors who have a fixed idea as to what they expect in a museum, especially those raised in the modernist tradition, will understandably find much that is confronting, and may need time to appreciate the museum for what it is rather than what they may have expected it to be.

Architecturally the museum is bold, well sited, arresting, futuristic and appears well built and designed. The site allows the building to have a personality of it's own, quite different from many of the other cultural facilities in the nation's capital.

Displays are socially inclusive and capture much that is quintessentially Australian in ways that are recognisable and accessible to a broad spectrum of the visiting public. It would be an insensitive visitor who is not both informed and moved by the many interesting ways the museum addresses the Australian landscape and associated environmental issues. Through both the "Eternity" and "Tangled Destinies" galleries the cameos of experiences presented provide glimpses into a rich range of Australian human experience framed by the Australian environment. The use of multi-media here, and elsewhere, is to be applauded, especially for its appeal to young audiences, though it is acknowledged that sound spill is something of a problem in those exhibitions.

Although good use is made of the vernacular to appeal to Australian audiences and to provide overseas visitors with a feel for the "Aussie" way of life, there is no tendency towards trivialisation. Indeed the Museum has been courageous, especially in its Gallery of First Australians, in giving space to controversial issues. Particularly this is true of its approach to understanding border clashes in pioneering settlement. Nor does the vernacular mean that the big themes of Australian development are neglected. Often, though, they are seen from a new perspective - not always through the eyes of the most powerful in the community.

Refreshingly the National Museum of Australia would seem to chart a relatively new path for such museums. In contrast to most similar institutions internationally it resists the temptation to be over-celebratory or unnecessarily boastful of national achievement. Similarly it refrains from the rather odious nationalistic if not dangerous jingoistic flavour of some of these institutions. It presents a much more realistic and honest portrayal of the nation.

We would respectfully suggest that the "Gardener of Australian Dreams" is not only an aesthetic disaster, but largely unintelligible to most visitors. From our experience museum guides are at a loss to assist helping visitors to interpret it.

Bringing to fruition a project of this size is a huge achievement and satisfying everyone's idea as to what should comprise a national museum would be an impossibility. With those factors in mind any review of the National Museum would do well to recognise all that has been achieved as it seeks to further improve this fledgling institution.

Yours faithfully

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