

19 Marcus Clarke Street – New South Acton 2/3/2022

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To begin I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are all meeting and the lands on which the Artbank offices operate around the country. In Canberra that is the lands of the Ngunnawal people, in Sydney it is the The Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, in Melbourne we reside on the land of The Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, and in Perth, our office sits on the land of the Noongar people. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded and I pay respect to elders, past, present and emerging.

It is an absolute pleasure to have the opportunity to provide a few words about the impressive collection of artworks that now hang in the corridors of New Acton South, and an honour to celebrate the beginning of what I'm sure will be a far-reaching, creative and collaborative relationship between the Artbank and 19 Marcus Clarke. And while I send my apologies for not being able to celebrate the unveiling in person I am no less thrilled to have worked on this project and help bring it to life.

First, I would like to state that simply by engaging Artbank you are all actively contributing to the health and vitality of the cultural ecosystem of Australia. Artbank was established more than four decades ago as a government initiative set up with two core objectives; to provide direct support to living Australian contemporary artists through the acquisition of their work in the primary market, and to promote the value of Australian contemporary art to the broader public by increasing its visibility.

For context, the Artbank collection was founded with an endowment of 600 artworks from what was then known as the National Collection (now the National Gallery of Australia), and has since grown to include more than 10,000 works spanning painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, textile, video and photography. Through leasing artworks to individuals, organisations, and to building projects such as New Acton South, Artbank lives up to its policy principle of promoting broad access to the very highest quality Australian contemporary art – as we see here tonight.

Artbank has similarities with other collecting institutions across Australia, but we are very different in both why we collect artwork and how we promote Australian art to clients and the public. One of the key differences being every dollar that is accrued from the rental fees goes directly back in to the Artbank acquisition and curatorial budget. This means, that everyone here who contributes to strata rates is not only creating a vibrant and stimulating environment to live, but you are assisting in

furthering the careers of Australian artist and helping them solidify their reputation and standing. In fact, Artbank is often the first public institution to acquire works by emerging and mid-career artists, which offers support and validation when it is needed most in their career. So remember, you are all a part of this!

As for the artworks on display, I truly commend the Building Committee on proceeding with such a strong and vibrant selection. The selection includes hugely significant artists such as Gordon Bennett, who's socially attuned works have help shaped the story of Australian Art, as well as similarly accomplished painters like Adam Lee, Steven Bush, and Idilko Kovacs, who's works command attention and are part of nearly all state collecting institution in Australia. There are fine examples print making, photography, and some remarkable works by Indigenous artists, such as Doris Bush Nungarrayi, Linda Syddick Napaltjarri, Evelyn Malgil and Iluwanti Ken who work out of internationally recognised Art Centres like Pupunya Tula, Warmun and Tjala Arts.

Anecdotally, I have heard the selection has already aroused a variety of reactions but on the whole they have been overwhelmingly favourable ones with only one or two instances of startlement. I was told by our art installer that he has not encountered such an engaged viewership and one that was so interested in what was being put up on the walls. In my opinion I could not be more pleased by this news. As all too often we can pass the artworks we come across in our day-to-day life without it eliciting any reaction at all. This I believe is a horrible lost opportunity, as great, and even good art has the wonderful ability to jolt one out of the mundane and quotidian, and offer up moments of contemplation, curiosity, joy, and on occasion, disquiet within.

I do hope this collection offers more of the first three qualities than of the last, but I also hope these artworks grow in to their surroundings and into your lives as you pass them each day. I invite you to use the narratives accompanying them as a starting point, but then invite you look deeper and engage with whatever meaning arises for you personally. Please enjoy their materiality and their wall presence, as these are two of the most wonderful and underrated qualities to absorb when interacting with original artworks in these settings.

It was a joy to work with a client that has such a clear appreciation for art and one that respects the aptitude of its residents. It certainly makes my job a lot more enjoyable and I believe creates far more favourable and memorable results. To end, I would like to leave you with the words of the late, Edmund Capon, former Director at the Art Gallery of New South Wales who was fervent in his belief that high quality and challenging art should be accessible to all, he says, "Art is the great communicator ... and it has (the) wonderful capacity to open doors and windows to people's mind and souls that they didn't know they had". Thank you again to all involved and for allowing me the opportunity to guide the curation of this selection. Enjoy the evening, the Art, and I look forward to an enduring and positive relationship with all of you at New Acton South. All the very best.

Martin