

ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY MS QUENTIN BRYCE AC CVO
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF
OPENING OF BRONWYN BANCROFT EXHIBITION – PASSION, POWER AND POLITICS
CARRIAGEWORKS, EVELEIGH
2 FEBRUARY 2012

My friends.

Thank you for your warm welcome.

I offer my respects to the traditional keepers of this remarkable place, and Euphemia, in thanking you for your words I want to acknowledge the debt of gratitude I owe to wise Indigenous women who have taught me, across my life, what it means to be an Elder.

I reflect on their lessons which have a deeper meaning for me now that I am a grandmother.

I am thrilled and delighted to be here this evening with you to celebrate the contribution of our outstanding artist Bronwyn Bancroft to Australian cultural life.

My friends, it's a great privilege to serve our community in this role.

I think it's true to say that I see the very best of our country, its magnificent landscape, our remarkable people, those qualities and characteristics that give us the Australianness we are proud to call our own.

I can't tell you how much it means to me, how much I value the opportunities I have to say thank you to many generous spirits who give to our nation in so many ways

uplifting, inspiring, enriching our lives.

It's a very lovely thing to do so on this occasion, to stand here, to express my admiration, respect and affection for a friend who is important and influential in my life, and indeed, is to all of us.

I must include here my grandchildren. How they have loved Bronwyn's books, especially that "Little Brown Dog" and how much they have enjoyed the richness of Indigenous culture and heritage in those shining pages.

Many in this gathering are well acquainted with aspects of Bronwyn Bancroft's

work as an artist.

Her career spans more than thirty years - we marvel at her achievements, at their breadth and depth.

We've shared awards, milestones, glittering prizes with her.

What pride we take in them, in the recognition accorded to her by galleries across this country and around the world, by commissions from patrons, supporters, enthusiasts, book publishers, authors, fashion houses.

We've been together at openings, at Galleries grand and small, sometimes so small the party was on the

street - of course a memorable one for me was the evening of Rubyrose's birth when the artist went into labour during my speech. It was quite a distraction. But I digress.

What this exhibition, *Passion, Power and Politics*, does is different, and it is a significant difference.

It brings to us works across all dimensions of the artist's repertoire, major pieces from national institutions, private collections, and her own archive.

For the first time we have an overview of Ms Bancroft's impact on Australian arts and culture, presented by a major cultural institution.

I want to congratulate Susan Gibb, Carriageworks Curator of Visual Arts.

Gibb invites us, enables us, to reflect on Bronwyn's art and beauty and to consider her indisputable position as a central figure in the development of contemporary urban Aboriginal art practices in NSW, and more widely Australia, alongside others like the late Michael Riley, Fiona Foley, Tracey Moffatt and Brenda L. Croft.

The collection moves us from early photographic experiments as a student at the Canberra School of Arts and textile design to her long term engagement and exploration of the discipline of painting, and concludes with her more recent return to photography.

I have been thinking carefully about the artist, her life, her work, in recent days.

As you get older that's what you do - think more deeply, give time to quietness, appreciate the beautiful things in life, poetry, music, gardens; seek gentler, wiser understandings, explore new concepts, listen thoughtfully.

Bronwyn speaks and writes about the passion, power and politics that underpin her life as an artist, in the most engaging ways that draw me in.

"The Invisible Sleeper" published in *Westerley* in November 2009, is an evocative touching picture of her multiplicity of journeys.

"My mind is chaotic with explosive ideas about new creations. I am constantly excited by the challenge of making another personal visual statement, and this propels my artistic journey," she writes.

Creativity has always been my soul's source, she says

I am struck by the energy that infuses her story, from girlhood at Tenterfield, student days in Canberra, setting up business in Sydney, *Designer Aboriginals*, the creation of *Boomali Aboriginal Artist Co-operative* - 25 years of striking, making a mark, fighting back, lighting up in the languages of the Kamilaroi, Wiradjuri and Bundjalung peoples of NSW.

This energy has been unleashed in Bronwyn's fervent experimentation and refinement of her picture making practice, and her trademark style - a bold approach to colour, intricate patterning, and themes of family, history, country.

"I just want to let my art evolve with my development as an Aboriginal person, mother and artist."

What a thrill to see again the magnificent opera cape - "*Cycle of Life*"; the joy of remembering that fashion parade at Au Printemps department store in 1987 where it wowed Paris.

Marks, shapes, colours, coming together with perfection.

"In *My Molecular Madness*" lent by the NGA, and in other small gouaches, we observe confidence growing and our imaginations are tickled by the twists and turns, the ingenuity.

Bronwyn's shift to larger scale works - on canvas and into more abstract modes of representation - is charted through the '90s - again an extraordinary breadth, fresh developments.

The seminal "Gene Pool 2002" looks into the idea of modern science and DNA, a motif to speak to family and cultural linking.

A play of words in the title connects the image of genetic makeup to Washpool Creek, the waters of the Clarence River that flow through her country in northern NSW.

Through the connection of this imagery, Bronwyn asserts the importance of country to contemporary Aboriginal people.

I am elated by her descriptions of reinvigoration, the cleansing, the reminiscing, the laughing, spending time in her people's country at the base of the Bundjalung Nation.

They warm my spirit.

"Attending to the greater theatre of nature; time of night, skies littered with the voluminous carpet of stars, the wild electrical storms and the birdsongs.

Oh the art, the beauty.

Oh the poetry of her language.

The blues, the purples, the oranges, the greens.

The faith, the strength, the imagination. The spiritual nourishment.

The intellectual rigour.

The passion, the power, the politics."

Bronwyn, I congratulate you on this splendid exhibition, on the important role you play in shaping the way Aboriginal art is understood in Australia and abroad.

Thank you for what you give to us through your life and work as an artist.

For what you signify in our community - that joie de vivre captured in yesterday's Sydney Morning Herald

"The older I get; the younger I act."

I am honoured to declare your Exhibition opened, and I congratulate Lisa Havilah, Director of Carriageworks, on the marvellous contribution you make to art, music, theatre.

It is always a treat to be here.

Thank you my friends.