

Victorian Ministry for the Arts

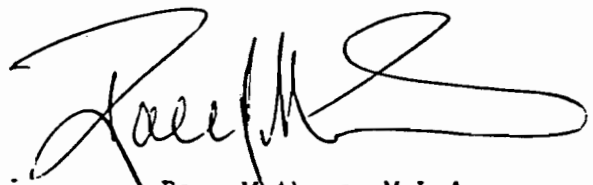
Office of the Minister,
The Hon. Race Mathews, M.L.A.,
Minister for the Arts.

Response to

Economic and Budget Review Committee.

Seventeenth Report to the Parliament:

An Inquiry into certain matters
concerning the National Gallery of Victoria
- December 1986.



Race Mathews, M.L.A.,
MINISTER FOR THE ARTS.



Australia
1788-1988

9th Floor, 168 Exhibition Street,
Melbourne, Victoria 3000, Australia.
Telephone (03) 651 1388

IN DECEMBER 1986 THE ECONOMIC AND BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORTED ON
A NUMBER OF ISSUES CONCERNING THE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATION OF THE
NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA. THE GOVERNMENT HAS CONSIDERED THE
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REPORT AND SUBMITS TO PARLIAMENT THIS RESPONSE
FOR THE INFORMATION OF MEMBERS.

ECONOMIC AND BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE

SEVENTEENTH REPORT TO THE PARLIAMENT

AN INQUIRY INTO CERTAIN MATTERS CONCERNING THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA

- DECEMBER 1986

Response To Individual Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

The Committee recommends that physical stocktakes of the Gallery collection be regularly conducted. For each major work and work on loan, this should be done annually. A random sample of other works in the collection could also be checked at least annually.

Response:

The Government agrees that a physical central stocktake of the collection should be conducted regularly to support the regular ongoing departmental stocktake which now occurs.

All works on indefinite loans have been checked since the Committee's report was received and, in future, stocktakes of works on loan will be done annually. Each major work, being those assessed by the relevant curator as the most valuable 25 works in each department, will be checked and sighted annually henceforth.

A random sample of the entire collection will be checked at least annually.

Recommendation 2:

The Committee recommends that Gallery management give urgent attention to locating works that remain unaccounted for after the current stocktake is completed.

Response:

The stocktaking of the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Victoria has been of the utmost value and an unprecedented success. The important and valuable aspects which have emerged from it are as follows:

- The Gallery can now locate virtually all paintings and sculptures in its collection.
- No large scale omissions through damage, theft or loss.
- The accomplishment of the central registry of the collection has moved dramatically forward, making computerisation of the collection a reality.
- As the first stocktake of a large and complex collection in 125 years it's remarkable how few works, numerically, are missing and how high the overall percentage of locating works has been to date.

- Stocktaking is a continuing activity and there is a firm basis of belief that many works not sighted at present will emerge before the stocktaking is completed.

A list of works that have to date been determined as stolen, destroyed or disappeared, is appended.

The National Gallery of Victoria did not exist as an independent legal entity until 1944 when it was separated from the Library Board and the recording of works independently acquired by the Gallery began only on that date. It is the cause of some regret to the present management of the Gallery that the list of works which were transferred from the old Swanston Street building to the new Gallery in St. Kilda Road in 1968 have been destroyed as they would have been a valuable guide regarding the state of the collection in 1968.

The Committee can be assured that every effort will be made to locate works unaccounted for as each phase of the stocktake is completed.

Recommendation 3:

The Committee recommends that Gallery management clearly establish that works of art on long term loan to Melbourne University are part of the State Collection.

Response:

The Gallery has now established to the Minister's satisfaction that the prints on loan to the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne are recognized to be part of the State Collection. The Gallery has the agreement of the University Librarian who (in a letter dated 10 March 1987) has referred to 'the National Gallery loan material'. The Gallery is confident that the loan of certain works to the Baillieu Library can and should continue.

A stocktake of these works will be undertaken in conjunction with the staff of the University Library at regular intervals.

Recommendation 4:

The Committee endorses recent actions taken to complete the stocktake as expeditiously as possible. The Gallery should aim to have the task completed at least by the end of 1986. Responsibility for ensuring adequate stocktaking and cataloguing should in future rest clearly with the Council of Trustees.

Response:

The end of 1986 was the Gallery's target for the completion of the stocktake but it is a monumental task, covering 125 years of acquisition, and it could not be completed in that time. The stocktake has a high priority but should be seen in context with other exhibition commitments and operational demands. The following areas are now on the data base:

<u>Department</u>	<u>Items</u>
Australian Painting	1,817
European Painting	736
Australian Watercolours	672
European Watercolours	395
Asian Art before 1970	2,182
Decorative Arts - Ceramics	3,059
- Metalwork	1,571
- Furniture	850
- Glass	1,651
- Sculpture	357
- Costume and Textiles before 1970	4,170
- Antiquities	1,159

When the whole collection is on data base, it will be necessary to upgrade the Gallery's personal computer to enable a complete catalogue to be undertaken. Investigations are now being held in conjunction with the Ministry for the Arts to decide the best catalogue system available.

It is pointed out that the above progress in compiling the data base represents the vast proportion by value of the Gallery's collection. There still remains a large number of very minor and/or study works, most of insignificant value, to be recorded.

The Gallery management anticipates that the detailed stocktake and cataloguing of the collection will be completed by December 1988.

Recommendation 5:

The Committee recommends that the Director of the Gallery, or delegated staff, consult with other major Australian art galleries to assess whether it would be feasible and desirable to adopt compatible cataloguing systems which may be accessible by members of the public.

Response:

In principle, the Government agrees that it is desirable that the National Gallery of Victoria catalogue system should be compatible with those adopted by other major Australian galleries. Nevertheless, the first priority is to employ a system compatible with all Victorian regional galleries. Such a system, already in operation at the Ministry for the Arts, is now being studied by the Gallery.

The Gallery will subsequently investigate the feasibility and desirability of adopting compatible cataloguing systems throughout Australia.

Recommendation 6:

The Committee recommends that independent, expert consultants be engaged to assess the adequacy of security arrangements at the Gallery. Assessments of security should be regularly conducted and consider not only the possibility of theft and damage by visitors to the Gallery, whether malicious or accidental, but also protection against fire and other natural hazards.

Response:

Independent expert consultants have previously been commissioned by the Council of Trustees to assess the adequacy of security arrangements at the Gallery.

In 1975, a report was prepared by Detective Sergeant P. Wilson of the Crime Prevention Bureau.

In 1984, Mr. Wilson, having retired from the Police Department and acting as an independent security advisor, prepared a second draft for the Council.

Following the theft of Picasso's "Weeping Woman" a working party was set up to further review security at the Gallery. The recommendations of the working party were accepted by the Minister for the Arts and additional funds were provided to facilitate implementation of the recommendations. As a consequence of this process, the security at the Gallery has been significantly upgraded.

The Gallery employed a Security Controller in February 1986 and is now in the process of appointing a Deputy Security Controller. The Security Controller has wide and varied security experience and is constantly reviewing security arrangements at the Gallery. In addition, the Security Controller co-ordinates frequent liaison with senior officials from the Police Department and other acknowledged security experts. Notwithstanding this however, it is acknowledged that there is a need for independent assessments of security to occur periodically.

The question of fire protection has been of major concern to the Council. Despite the Gallery's approval of major steps to upgrade fire protection, these changes have been stopped by the South Melbourne Council's Building Regulations. The Gallery received on 22 April 1987 a report from the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board on Fire Protection at the National Gallery. This report will be examined by the Council shortly and appropriate action taken.

Recommendation 7:

The Committee recommends generally that maintenance and improvement of the security system at the Gallery should have a high claim on available resources. Responsibility for security should rest with the Council of Trustees.

Response:

The Government has placed considerable emphasis on the security of the collection with provision of additional resources in order that several improvements could be implemented including the recent installation of a closed circuit television monitoring system. It is agreed that maintenance and improvement of the security system should continue to have a high claim on available resources.

Recommendation 8:

The Committee recommends that relevant information enabling periodic indicative valuations should be included on the central catalogue record of each work of art.

Response:

It is not standard practice for major public galleries, anywhere in the world to value all works in the collection individually. Notwithstanding this however, the Council of Trustees proposes to value and include on the central catalogue the 25 major works in each department, as assessed by the relevant curators. These valuations of major works will be reviewed annually and included on the central catalogue record of each work of art.

Recommendation 9:

The Committee recommends that the State collection of art works be regularly valued by using a cost-efficient mixture of techniques, including physical inspection, market intelligence and statistical sampling. The central computerised register of works could be used for this purpose.

Response:

It has been extremely difficult to value accurately the State collection where the prices of art works are quite often driven up or down by what can only be termed speculative factors. Notwithstanding this however, Council ensures that major works of art are always valued when they are requested for external loan, in order to facilitate appropriate insurance.

As a result of the Committee's recommendation, the Gallery is examining ways in which it may be possible to establish a model for micro and macro valuations to be updated, using cost effective techniques and, possibly, generalised movements in the Consumer Price Index and/or art market trends.

The Gallery will continue to make enquiries but, at present, is not aware of any useful formula utilized anywhere in the international gallery and museum world. It is agreed that the central computerised register of works would be the logical starting point.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Council of Trustees record in its annual reports the number of works held in the departmental collections of the Gallery and the total values of these collections. The value of individual works should not be disclosed, but should be provided to the Auditor-General, if requested.

Response:

The Council of Trustees will, in future, include in its Annual Report, the number of works held in each department progressively as the relevant data base is completed. The value of 25 major works in each area, as assessed by the relevant curators, will become available from the central catalogue, but for security reasons, should be exempt from Freedom of Information enquiry.

In regard to requests from the Auditor-General, it is agreed that when so requested, the estimated value of any specific item, selected at random, could be determined and supplied to the Auditor-General in confidence.

IN REGARD TO THE ECONOMIC AND BUDGET REVIEW COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS 11 TO 13, CONCERNING REPORTING, STAFFING AND FINANCIAL MATTERS, IT IS THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEW THAT EXISTING ARRANGEMENTS PROVIDE APPROPRIATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF STAFF AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES. IT IS THEREFORE NOT PROPOSED TO MAKE ANY CHANGES TO THE PRESENT ARRANGEMENTS.

Recommendation 11:

The Committee recommends that the National Gallery of Victoria Act 1966 be amended to provide that:

- (a) the Council of Trustees has autonomy within its budget allocation to meet its prescribed functions in the most efficient way.
- (b) if the Minister wishes to direct the Council of Trustees in relation to any of its functions, he/she should be required to do so in writing to the Council; and
- (c) untied Council funds may be allocated, at its discretion, to any of its prescribed functions including stocktaking, cataloguing and security.

Response:

The Government notes this recommendation. In relation to Ministerial directions to the Council of Trustees, it is proposed to incorporate in amending legislation for the National Gallery of Victoria a clause, the same as that provided for other Authorities within the Ministry for the Arts, which will specify that "The Council of Trustees shall perform its functions and exercise its powers subject to the general direction and control of the Minister."

Recommendation 12:

The Committee recommends that the Ministry for the Arts in conjunction with the Council of Trustees and the Public Service Board review the requirement for all staff to be appointed under the Public Service Act with a view to allowing the Council greater autonomy in the employment and allocation of staff to particular functions.

Response:

The Government notes this recommendation.

The options available for the employment of staff contained in the Public Service Act provide the flexibility required by management for the effective employment and utilisation of staff resources.

Recommendation 13:

The Committee recommends that any proposed changes in employment practices, arising from the recommended review of the requirement for all staff to be appointed under the Public Service Act, be subject to negotiation with representative union organisations.

Response:

The Government notes this recommendation.

Recommendation 14:

The Committee recommends that the Director of the Gallery be given the additional responsibility of preparing an annual financial report which consolidates the information now contained in the end of year accounts of the Council of Trustees and of the Ministry for the Arts relating to the Gallery. It is also recommended that this report be incorporated within the Annual Report of the Council of Trustees presented to Parliament.

Response:

The Government notes and supports this recommendation.

Future annual reports will show the direct contribution by Government to the operation of the Gallery for such items as salaries, expenses, and works and services. Reports will continue to provide the Council of Trustees financial statements.

Recommendation 15:

The Committee recommends that the Council of Trustees be subject to the requirements of the Annual Reporting Act 1983.

Response:

Although not subject to the requirements of the Annual Reporting Act 1983, the Council of Trustees annual accounts have, since 1 July 1983, been prepared in accordance with those requirements with the exception of recognizing the value of works or art in the Balance Sheet as assets, as acquisitions have been historically expensed in each financial year. It is however, intended to schedule the National Gallery of Victoria Act to the Annual Reporting Act 1983 with effect from June 1988.

APPENDIX A

WORKS STOLEN, DESTROYED OR DISAPPEARED

Pre-1968

Two contemporary Australian paintings, one by Paul Haefliger and one by John Olsen, were destroyed in a fire at Corryong High School on 26 November, 1963.

The most serious theft pre-1968 was that of William Dobell - Portrait of Robert Wharton.

The earlier thefts of a painting by David Wilkie, the Regency artist and the bronze Head of a Besharim Boy by Tina Wentscher are regrettable but do belong to different eras in the history of the Gallery.

Works known to have been stolen or destroyed and not included in lists of works not sighted

Australian oil paintings

Haefliger, Paul	Old House, Sydney)	Both destroyed by fire Corryong High School on 26 November, 1963
Olsen, John	Sydney Waterfront)	
Dobell, William	Portrait of Robert Wharton	Stolen pre-1968
Rowell, John	The Clearing Storm	Stolen 22 June, 1945

European oil paintings

Wilkie, David	The Gentle Shepherd	Stolen 26 August, 1926
---------------	---------------------	------------------------

WORKS STOLEN, DESTROYED OR DISAPPEARED

Post 1968

The most regrettable recent thefts are those of two prints by the contemporary Australian printmaker, Graham Peebles. They are works which can be replaced.

Works known to have disappeared since 1968

Australian prints known to have been stolen

Peebles, Graeme	French Fruit. 1980	Mezzotint on paper	Michell Endowment 1980
Peebles, Graeme	Midnight Canneloni, 1979	Mezzotint on paper	Michell Endowment 1980

Stockbook marked
"Stolen August 1982"

Sculpture known to have been in Gallery since 1968 but not sighted in stocktake

Caro, Antonio	Sal, 1975	Salt and wire	Presented by John Stringer 1975
Oliver, Charles	Allan Wilke, 1979	Plaster, white paint	Bequeathed by Mrs. Charles Oliver 1979