

# DETRITUS

ADDRESSING CULTURE & THE ARTS

Robyn Archer



### Acknowledgments

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## Detritus

Following my keynote address at the 2009 Garma Festival in East Arnhem Land, someone introduced me to a fascinating and timely debate concerning the recycling of human waste. The central question of this is that if our waste is going to be recycled and returned to the urban grid as energy or water, which then attracts a resale value, at what point do we charge for its use?

Waste is the one thing that all human beings produce on a daily basis. But having been taught from birth that it is a stinky, toxic nasty, up until now we have been glad to get rid of it. Some societies have long made use of human waste as compost, but for developed nations the notion of giving it value is relatively new. It is a subject which should interest anyone who sees the logic in putting a price on something they fed and processed.

Clearly the person who raised this with me had made a connection between human waste and the word ‘detritus’, but it should not be assumed that in calling this collection of keynote speeches *Detritus* I consider it crap. (Some may.) Each piece was written and ‘performed’ for a specific occasion. They are now simply the remains of the performative act of delivering keynote addresses. Even *The Myth of the Mainstream*, though not spoken, was written on demand and in haste while on the road. Alas, I’m still not a good recycler, and start each new speech from the ground up as each new occasion demands. Offered a topic, or conscious of the theme of a conference, I have always tried to give a specific interpretation of the matters at hand. These pieces are not essays; they are less exacting, written to be delivered in a spoken vernacular, and were consciously built for performance, for the particular delivery I gave them at the time. In any case, I have no particular wagon to push, no motivating tale, no single glorious moment around which to wrap an after-dinner speech.

Some of the things I bellyached about have since changed, or been changed. *I* have changed, am always changing. Now there are new addresses to make in new times and changed conditions. They, too, will be things of the moment.

My foreword to the Garma speech mentions Wesley Enoch’s suggestion that I might be better off talking about ‘memory’ or ‘artefact’. This kind of response may be common in those who find the word ‘detritus’ a natural pejorative. I don’t. When I use the word in relation to the arts, I’m not suggesting that what is left over from the artistic (perhaps *any*) process is to be despised. (It may indeed be a source of great pride and achievement.) And it may also be possible for the creator to let it go. In fact in some instances it is essential

for the creator to let it go in order to move forward with the artistic process.

In offering ‘Detritus Theory’ I hoped to persuade consumer-minded, contemporary audiences and those who fund the arts to view the process of artistic production in a different light. The word ‘creativity’ is bandied about a lot these days, but concern for the real conditions of creativity is lacking. Our consumer society focuses on what can be consumed rather than how a product is created. For many consumers the end product is what matters, and this rationale has been used to judge the artist as well. I know this isn’t true for all artists, perhaps not even for a majority of them. There’s a fanciful, romanticised image of the artist as impossible, dedicated and driven. I can hear the Hollywood voice now – Heston as Leonardo, Granger as Paganini – coupled with the grimace of visionary ambition: ‘*This...will be my greatest work!*’ This is, however, a false image.

Most artists, apart from those just foolishly in love with fame, know very well that they have no idea what their ‘greatest work’ is. That’s a matter of time. From their oeuvre it will be others who make judgments about the quality of one work over another. The main concern for most artists is to ensure they secure the ongoing conditions to make an oeuvre possible. The most obvious route is through a commercial transaction during which they let go of some part of their work and receive in return the means to buy the time and materials for the next part of the process.

Of course it’s possible to love one’s past work and be proud of a particular work or series, and this follows as much for a composer, songwriter, writer, choreographer and film-maker as for a visual artist. But surely it’s more important to enable

the artist to continue doing that work, letting it develop in practice, thereby creating the larger body of work.

I'd love to see greater acknowledgement of the artist's long career, taking into consideration the process of development, the action and moments of creativity that are vital for any product to be made. And for many creators this sense of ongoing context is far more important than any individual work. Perhaps it's because I'm a singer that I think of creativity in this way. My song is gone the minute I sing it. Most of my writing has been a thing of the moment – even the songs and plays I've written have been part of an ongoing line. I do it for myself, for what I will learn by doing it, not to create a finished thing.

People are, however, hardwired to classify things and people, presumably in order to create order. A couple of years ago a journalist wrote about me in a way that suggested that there had been some kind of gap in my activity and that I was 're-inventing myself' after this hiatus. Because what I had been doing – in Melbourne, Mildura, Perth, New York, Pittsburgh and various spots in Europe – hadn't made it onto her radar, she assumed I had somehow 'ceased operations'. It remains a source of wonder to me how journalists frequently assume that if something happened, somebody wrote about it and put it someplace where they can read it.

And over the years I've found that people, like that journalist, often have a narrowed view of my activities and interests: Richard Wherrett openly told me what many felt – that I should have just stuck to singing; lesbians have wished that I continued singing lesbian feminist songs for the rest of my life; my beloved mentor John Willett was tolerant of *A Star Is Torn* though I'm sure he would have preferred I

hadn't done it; and classical music buffs recoiled from my interpretation of *Pierrot Lunaire*, directed by Barrie Kosky. In fact I have dozens of examples of people who have especially liked a bit of what I've done and either don't like or remain ignorant of all the rest.

As much as I deeply appreciate and am grateful for the attention almost anything I've done has received (all precocious only-children are), the point is that all of it has been just part of a process, which is, thankfully, still moving, and at an exhilarating pace. I have never had delusions about a 'greatest work'. I have never had goals much beyond next week. I am grateful to have been able to go on securing the conditions to allow a process, and am constantly surprised at what I find myself doing.

For all these reasons, I'm happy to let go of this collection. Its value for me is in the way occasional addresses forced me to articulate things that would otherwise have remained inchoate in the maelstrom of daily activity and thought. I can only hope that the speeches also have some value to you, the reader.

As for detritus and art, if we want artists to continue to produce work we need to create and sustain systems that help them do so. Financially successful artists already have those conditions through audiences, buyers and patrons. My concern is for those whose remarkable endeavours have not yet achieved fame, celebrity, notices, popularity and sales. These are artists of all ages, and we need all of them. It would be a very great loss if all we manage to care for is the very bit the artist is happy to relinquish.

February 2010



# Art and Society



# Garma Opening Keynote

Garma Festival, Gulkala, North East Arnhem Land,  
August 2009

*The Garma Festival is an eye and ear-opening experience: I wish I'd been able to experience it before I spoke there. The insights into Yolngu land and culture have been transforming, and the passion of strong women such as Rosalie Konuth on homelands indelible in my mind. It's another country, and most of us in Australia really don't know what's going on there.*

*What seemed to resonate most from my speech was the Detritus Theory and many people spoke to me afterwards about that. My compatriot Wesley Enoch thought I should be talking about 'artefact' or 'memory': I like that, but should point out that just because you are ready to part with what is left over from the artistic process, it is not necessarily unloved. It's just that you can let it go, even while retaining pride in the finished product, and get on with the next artistic process. Many people cannot let go of artefacts or memories, just as some artists cannot let go of some works – the 'not for sale' sign looming large.*

*Not knowing if the Detritus Theory held for Indigenous artists, it was overwhelmingly confirmed for me this visit at the Yirrkala Art Gallery and Museum where I was told that for these artists, parting with a painting on bark means nothing (except for the value of the sale which does indeed buy time, sustenance, and materials to get on with the next works) since what is contained 'inside' the work can never be taken away, never bought or sold, and can be replicated many times.*

I pay my respects to the Yolngu people, the traditional owners of this land and to their elders past and present. And thanks too to you Mandawuy Yunupingu for your words today and your inspirational artistry and your work for the Yothu Yindi Foundation. Thanks Stephen, and Minister, Peter Garrett, for being here with us.

I'm not sure what I can offer you here today. You're such a mixed bunch – and look at where we are. That we are just all here together in such a place should render us speechless. Although I do speak about the arts all over the world, I've never been honoured by an invitation to such an event as this and I hope what I say can be useful to you. The list of speakers at this key forum is exceptional and there's a lot of expertise here to offer vital detail about the whys and how-tos of Indigenous creative industry, and I know you're keen to get your teeth into all of that.

But what I suggest here is a kind of philosophical framework for your discussions over the next few days.

I certainly don't want to start rolling out a list of credentials since I am always going to be something of an outsider, honoured by your invitation and your welcome – and hope

that as an artist, a creator and an artistic director lucky enough to create opportunities to collaborate with other artists and to enable their new work, we already share some common ground. But I do want to say a little about this place in Australia because it has been important to me.

I first came to the top of Australia around thirty-five years ago, three months before Cyclone Tracy hit Darwin. I had not imagined that that first trip would so change my perspective on the land. I said ever after that I really didn't know anything about the continent of my birth until I started coming up here. I'm very grateful that it was my singing that gave me that opportunity. I made many trips after that but those were the days of the Arts Council tours, and we rarely had the opportunity of playing to Aboriginal audiences, even though I was kindly invited onto Aboriginal lands during some of those tours.

Prior to these mind-bending adventures, it wasn't until I met Auntie Leila Rankine in Adelaide, my hometown, and saw her work with the Aboriginal Orchestra, that I started to learn some things about Indigenous Australian culture. Leila was amazing.

She had used all her political strength to get the University of Adelaide, my alma mater, to set up a centre of ethnomusicology (in fact just across the road from the British Hotel where I once lived with my great grandparents, who owned it, and where my great grandmother forced me into my very first performances when I was four). Leila said she started the Orchestra just to keep the kids off the street. It was terrible music – Bert Kaempfert's *Swingin' Safari* with young girls sawing away at violins: but at least they were not on the streets, said Leila – and there was the little Vietnamese boy,

his legs in callipers, recently adopted by very Celtic coloured Australians, and relating more to the Aboriginal kids in the orchestra than to his adoptive family at the time.

But out of that came the jazz ensemble and out of that one of the first of a great string of Aboriginal bands, Wrong Side of the Road. She really started something. Dropping in to the Centre you were more likely to see elders come down from the Pit Lands, or up from the Coorong, sharing food and teaching little kids to paint, than academic pursuits in ethnomusicology. But Leila was experimenting: tradition, family and elders from up country blended with contemporary music in that place, and she was getting real results. Remember this, because I'll come back to it. There was no such title then as *creative industries*. The commercialisation of Aboriginal contemporary art had barely begun.

What Leila had was a laboratory for contemporary creative expression in music, but with traditional touchstones and tangible connections to country. And she had a couple of things which I have discovered are global essentials for the advancement of the arts anywhere at any time – a backer with some cash and a venue (in this case the university) and a champion in government (in this case the reforming South Australian government under the leadership of Don Dunstan).

And I'm glad to say that many of my peers feel that that fortunate circumstance may be here again – that is, having champions of the arts in government.

These conditions of belief in the arts in the Dunstan era allowed research and development in an atmosphere without expectations, without a commercial goal in mind, without

a market in mind, and in the true spirit of innovation and adventure in art. I admired Leila and her family more than I can say, and she taught me far more than I recognised at the time.

Gradually through such a positive introduction I found ways to build on my scant knowledge and experience – through events such as the Darwin Mayday Parade which I directed (where I met and worked with Larrakia women), then working with people like Rhoda Roberts, Lillian Crombie and Leah Purcell, and eventually in my role as artistic director of big-budget festivals which allowed me to extend invitations, and assist and enable projects, to a very wide range of Indigenous performers and projects. From the very first major contemporary Indigenous Biennial (the Adelaide Biennial in 2000) which we invited Brenda Croft to curate, to bringing Narbalek south to Adelaide for the first time, to Archie Roach and Ruby Hunter as a duo and then enabling their larger project with the Australian Art Orchestra in Melbourne; from the grand opening of my first Melbourne Festival in 2002 in the State Theatre with a large group from the Kimberley telling the story of a massacre which they had feared to tell before (*Fire Fire Burning Bright*), and were now telling on one of the biggest stages in the country and the first ceremonial cleansing of a massacre site near Hobart for Ten Days on the Island; to working on Ningali and advocating on behalf of projects such as *Napartji Napartji*, I am privileged to have been able to use my various roles to assist, enable and tour such works.

The last time Mandawuy Yunupingu and I met was when my role was as artistic director designate of the Adelaide Festival of Arts. It was 1996 and Adelaide was hosting its

last Grand Prix. Mandawuy and I were both driving in the celebrity race and both undertook a week's advanced driver training at the Virginia raceway. I think maybe the bush tracks had given him the advantage – he was a real leadfoot, almost as good a driver as he is singer and songwriter, and streets ahead of me.

But years before that I had come to sing in Nhulunbuy – the venture up here was one of the first great eye-openers for me. I had been to Groote Eylandt to give a concert, and afterwards I was taken for a spontaneous motorbike ride in the moonlight.

Dodging the manganese trucks that roared like great night-haunting triple-backed dragons along the purpose-built road, I tried hard to imagine what it must have been like before the mining ventures – grass taller than two men, the moonlight, and people who knew the land and cared for it moving quietly about their business. I experienced an enormous sense of irreplaceable loss.

But brought to Yirrkala here a few days later I was shown the art room, a tin shed where large paintings were being stored. The era had not long begun when people here were being encouraged to translate their totems into permanent paintings for sale and exhibition.

I stared at the intricate ochre lines on tall strong stands of bark and marvelled at the imagery: I knew each pattern would have a meaning beyond my understanding, but there were also by now more literal and figurative representations of lizards, birds, turtles and most impressive of all, crocodiles. I was particularly taken with one magnificent painting of a croc, one of whose legs was foreshortened. I was alone in the shed, left to wander and wonder alone, when suddenly the

keeper of the pictures at that time, Steve, brought me out of my trance:

‘I’d like to introduce you to one of the artists. He painted that one.’

I turned to shake hands with a man whose other arm was foreshortened. I’m no expert in either art or Aboriginality; ultimately I’m just a singer, like many of you, a bringer of stories. But I felt the spirits move at that time, and recall the moment as the first time I could bear my own witness to the central connection between Australian Aboriginal people and their art: nothing separated them.

Some thirty years or more later we were gathered in Parliament House in Canberra, trying to put good words to big ideas at the 2020 Summit. One of the frequently recurring themes in the creative stream was the urgent need to have creativity seen as something at the heart of Australian society, rather than as a leisure-time frill at the edge, a luxury only to be afforded when the business of real life was in hand.

Gangs of mostly whitefellas were giving vent to their angst about how this notion of centrality could be achieved, when Wesley Enoch, boundary-riding both the Creative and Indigenous streams of 2020, suggested we look no further than the culture of Australia’s Indigenous peoples. He pointed out that for them there was no separation between art and life. Art and creativity lay at the heart of Australian Indigenous society: traditions and skills were passed on to kids from very early in their lives and these traditions and skills were a constant part of ceremony, celebration, grieving, meeting, recording, storytelling and histories. Why would white Australia not look hard at the ways in which traditional

owners of the land kept art at the centre of life, and simply take its cue from those customs and traditions? Why not simply follow that brilliant lead?

I'm not sure that that suggestion has been taken up.

And that may well be because white Australia is not particularly well wired for the qualities that are required for valuing the ephemeral, or the spiritual. Valuing the ephemeral is something I have been thinking about for some time now: it has a great deal to do with art – I know that – and I suspect it may have a very great deal to do with those Indigenous art practices which have made the leap into creative industries, but I'm sure many of you will be able to inform or correct me on this.

There was a time when my Jewish lawyer, born in New York, resident in London, thought that I had a fat financial payout coming my way. I was living in London at the time, but back in Australia someone wanted to restage one of my one-woman shows with someone else performing in it. I said I didn't want that to happen, I might want to do it again myself some time, but they went ahead anyway with a version of that show: my lawyer believed we had a very strong case for demanding compensation on intellectual property grounds. The solicitors on both sides back in Australia were very keen for this case to go forward as it would have been a test case at the time, and it cost me several thousand dollars (a lot for me at that time) to discover that we did not yet have laws protecting intellectual property in Australia. It was around the same time that Terry Yumbulul was unsuccessful in *his* case against the Reserve Bank for the use of an image of the Morning Star pole on the \$10 note. Fortunately those laws have now shifted somewhat.

Nevertheless, even at that time I learned something valuable. My solicitor sat me down and explained that the reason intellectual property laws had banged themselves against the Supreme Court ceiling for so long was that Australian law had been built upon the values of the first squattocracy. They believed that if you could put a fence around it, you could claim it was yours and therefore have it protected by the law. But ephemeral or spiritual values were not enshrined in law.

You could claim copyright in a book because it was physical, tangible and existed as a thing you could see and hold – there was a visible solid thing to protect and a saleable product. If someone used your words, you could point to them in print and say ‘these are *my words*’. But how could you do that with an idea? An idea was not considered as something worth protecting in law: you can’t protect an idea, they said. How could you do it with a belief? If that belief had never been written down in a holy book – if that set of beliefs was handed down in sacred law passed from generation to generation in a culture that had no books?

I thought at the time, no wonder the clash between Indigenous Australians and European settlers was so profound: not just that it was intrusive, violent and dispossessing, but that there was a fundamental clash of value systems. As I understand it, Indigenous Australians saw life and kinship in all things: boundaries were not defined by physical fences, but by cultural custom and systems of respect which were invisible to the European eye.

Aboriginal spirituality resided in all natural forms and spaces, whereas Europe’s church had long abandoned animism and required all the trappings of dogma, the written word,

special architectures, instruments and often lavish displays of wealth, all of which could be legitimised only through an obscure and often corrupt human hierarchy.

And so too with art. By the time Europeans arrived in Australia, there certainly still existed forms of their folk art (music, dance, carving, storytelling) which would have been similarly handed down through families and an apprentice system, and still practised widely by the first colonists; and professional popular entertainments too, which also eventually made their way into the larger settlements.

But European ‘art’ had long been bolstered through hierarchies similar to those of organised religion: indeed works of art were first of all the provenance of the church or royalty alone, and then of the ruling and educated classes.

There was already a sense that art was something produced by individual genius, to be consumed by those with good taste enough to understand it. For the rest, folk art and popular entertainment would be good enough. The notion of any culture’s craftsperson producing objects which may well have been very beautiful, but whose value was utilitarian, had started to separate away from the hierarchy of would-be genius producing art for art’s sake – and so too the artist’s inherent and central value for any society.

We must remember that the composer, or the poet, was not initially an individual self-motivating genius, but someone hired by church or king to whip up new works for special occasions. They too had been craftspersons whose works had utilitarian value. But this concept had already largely disappeared by the time Europeans arrived in Australia.

Aboriginal society had no such separation – its artists were, and are, valued members at the heart of that society.

I imagine that that centrality, that importance and respect, persists today in those communities, like this one, who have been able to preserve it. It's not just about celebrity or individual genius, or about those things alone, but about the weight of community responsibility and dignity which that artist bears throughout his or her life. And it is surely about the strength of continuing living traditions and spiritual value systems too.

I have to believe that this perspective of art and artists being centrally important in Indigenous societies is absolutely crucial to the understanding of Indigenous creative industries in the twenty-first century.

You may have detected that I believe art and creative industry are different things. I use the terms to mean different things. I have spoken about this a lot recently, but it's worth repeating the basics here. I think it's dangerous to use *creative industry* as an all-embracing term which includes art. I believe they are different beasts – that art often proceeds from something other than the commercial motivation or financial regulation that defines industry, and that art is frequently unprofitable, haphazard and nothing like any concept we have of an 'industry'.

I believe that any form of art, perhaps new, groundbreaking and unfamiliar, which arises unbidden from those who are driven to express themselves, just like art or craft which arises from socially or ceremonially utilitarian sources, is of every bit as much value as art which makes the leap into industry – that is, art which is organised, regulated and created with a market and profit in mind.

The danger in lumping arts in with creative industry is that it may start to be assumed that only those things which

act in a business-like way and can be profitably marketed and replicated or duplicated en masse, as in other industries, are worthy of investment. There are many activities in the arts which are not financially profitable, which are ragged at the edges and are disorganised, but are of immense social and human value – not least of which is that they inspire those working in creative industries and are often the first step of something which later itself makes the move into creative industry. In addition these sometimes crazy, usually unrecognisable, often unbeautiful expressions of original thought and experimentation often give us the jolt which is the shock of the new – scientifically proven to stimulate our brain function in ways that no other experience can.

Professor V. S. Ramachandran has shown that genuine and unexpected adventures in art have the power to stimulate the creative muscle in everyone – not just art lovers, but all of us in any walk of life, and that nothing else so stimulates all parts of the brain.

That said, the move from art into creative industry, or a direct dive straight into industrial applications of creativity, can lead to activities which are both beautiful, functional, popular and profitable – and as such are also, in addition to art, worth investing in. We should applaud the federal government's moves in this direction – the royalties for resale of visual art, contemporary music initiatives and the new University of Technology Sydney Centre for Creative Industries and Innovation. These are all good initiatives.

But in the current enthusiasm for training and investing in creative industries we must also maintain the structures, systems and resources, as well as creating opportunities, for the development and nurturing of the kind of art which

may never end up in the creative industries, but will be nonetheless of equal value. And indeed the new Artstart program is also a good move in this direction.

I think Djon Mundine was recognising this kind of difference when he said:

Aboriginal visual art funding has always been about making a profit, and it is constantly scrutinised for returns in money terms...[other forms of art] are funded because they are seen to be important in their own right in defining national identity.

Yet I would make the point that at present the economic and industrial bottom line is figuring large in all art forms, and that genuinely innovative experiments (which have the greatest chance of defining what a clever country really is) are equally prey to the frequently ill-judged evaluation and exploitation of market forces.

Even though the products of such art may remain largely ephemeral – such as a live performance which goes unrecorded, or a long process of research and investigation which results in no product at all, we must acknowledge the value of things which are not necessarily for sale, not designed for a tourist or international art market, not destined for recording or manufacturing contracts and mass production. Not to value such art and consequently not to continue to ensure an environment in which such art is encouraged and resourced is to ensure that we behave with no more sophistication and understanding than squatters from 200 years ago.

We must remember that original and unfamiliar excursions into art are the stimulus for many in the creative

industries where practitioners rely on the fresh and original ideas, images and methodologies of new artists – or old artists on new adventures.

This is the value of all artists everywhere.

Having witnessed artists who continued to work in Eastern Europe or Africa or Palestine through the worst times of bloody racial conflict, I see that beauty and finesse are of less importance to them than simply surviving and telling their stories. As the German poet Bertolt Brecht wrote:

In the dark times  
Will there also be singing?  
Yes, there will also be singing  
*About* the dark times

He also wrote:

Food is the first thing, morals follow on

Perhaps we need to be singing:

Health is the first thing, creativity follows on

Making art when you live in a war zone isn't easy; it's well nigh impossible. And for many Indigenous Australians, I imagine life *means* something like living in a war zone – fighting for basic health conditions, fighting for land, fighting for the preservation of custom, law and spiritual values. These people must have access to the benefits of art and artistic expression every bit as much as those whose opportunities have afforded them potential entry into the

creative industries. The thing is, you just never know where the next great artist, or movement, or industry is going to spring from: and often it's from extremely unlikely places.

We need to have faith in investment of all kinds – infrastructure, education and training, materials, mentors, funding, private and corporate sponsorship – for things which may have no immediate demonstrable result, no great beauty, no shining prize-winner, no chart-topper. These encounters with art may produce many years later not just a great artist, but a bright scientist, an engineer, legal brain, sociologist, architect – or simply a group of people whose story is recorded and preserved for generations to come. Architect Dillon Kombumerri said:

Culture is living and changing, and can still have a unique identity linked with past history; however it requires flexibility to adjust for the future...

Focusing on end product alone has enormous drawbacks. It may well be at the core of profitable creative industries across the spectrum of genre and practice, but in fact it belies genuine artistic process. I have discussed my Detritus Theory with a number of artists by now and most seem to agree. This is my first opportunity to find out whether it holds for Aboriginal art too, though I do get a clue from Dillon Kombumerri:

Indigenous architecture and design consultancy Merrima advocates that the process of making the building is more important than the building itself. We look at cultural identity, place and local peoples' shared history as the generating idea for form.

When we ‘buy’ a work of art we only take away the detritus of the artistic process; that is, what is left over from that process. Why on earth would any artist feel comfortable about giving up a part of their life’s work unless they felt that it was now finished with and no longer of any use to them? The value for them is surely in what the process has taught them, the lessons it has given to go on with the next phase of the process. What we give the artist in exchange for these leftovers is money to buy materials and time to get on with the next artistic process.

If this is the case, we should focus much more seriously on process and how to enable and resource it. The painting or sculpture or CD or DVD you buy is not the important bit, yet that’s what marketing leads us to believe. The important bit is its making and how that process will inform the next period of making. This way of viewing the processes of art is also of immense benefit to those who practise in more ephemeral forms – singing, music and dancing for instance. The *real thing* cannot be bought and owned and hung on the wall – it can only be shared and experienced. A recording is just not the same thing. Therefore this way of seeing allows equity in all art forms – not just privilege for those art forms whose detritus can be sold off at the end of the process.

I would suggest that even something as massive as a major architectural project is perceived by the artist (in this case an architect) as part of a lifelong process of development, rather than the way we who are not architects view their output – that is as a series of monuments each finite in itself.

The success of the latest project means fresh invitations where a new project can be undertaken. I think this explains

a lot about artistic sensitivity. If Jørn Utzon was unable to realise his design for the Sydney Opera House because of political and financial interference, how could he learn from it? Hence his understandable anger. How could he move on with confidence to the next project? I think most artists are the same – let me do the work, let me make the mistakes, let me learn from them and then the next project will benefit from that process. As artists we work in a continuum for our whole lives, not in a spasmodic series of finite outputs.

Working for a specific market very often interrupts this natural process – if we are working only to supply demand, how do we bring fresh ideas into being, how do we encourage new markets, how can innovation work if we only look to current demand according to current tastes? We would remain for the rest of our working lives as the equivalent of a cover band. Properly resourced research and development, respect for experiment, tolerance of failure and support of those working at the unknown margins and the frontiers is every bit as important as resourcing those creative industries which are currently sexy – and screen-based IT projects most instantly come to mind.

It's not that audiences or markets are unimportant. They too provide invaluable feedback into an artist's process. As Vincent van Gogh's work proved, art exists and develops in relative isolation too, but he was unhappy about his lack of exposure and sales and had to remain unaware of the path his art may have taken had he had the audience in his lifetime which he had posthumously. But artists at the creative edge cannot be slaves to audiences or markets – their most adventurous work will create new audiences and markets, new intelligence, new ways of seeing the world, either on the

epic scale, or on the extremely local. This is the inestimable value of artists everywhere.

Therefore my plea at the start of this forum is that we be careful that creative industry has not become a catchphrase (invented during Blair's Britain as it happens to describe the kinds of activities which might serve to regenerate fading urban precincts) for things which can be marketed and be made profitable. While I applaud new initiatives and investment in creative industries, and admire their skill and enterprise, I feel sure that the conceptual and ephemeral is every bit as worthy of support and investment, no less in art than in science. And it may be, though only you here can advise me in this, that for the creative practices and arts of Indigenous Australia it is even more important to preserve this distinction.

I have a feeling that no group of artists anywhere in the world is better equipped than Indigenous Australians to participate fully, and succeed, in the creative industries on a global scale (this is already proven – in painting, design, film and contemporary music) yet at the same time preserve vital links to tradition, family, history, memory and the land, so perfectly cared for by Indigenous Australians for tens of thousands of years. For many their ties are so core to an unwritten yet perfectly understood and shared spirituality that the most daring leap into the marketplace will never shake their heart and their faith.

But not all are in such enviable positions. Not all will be able to take immediate advantage of the many welcome strategies for investment in creative industries and their proliferating academic extensions. *We must ensure that we don't lose the ones we don't yet know about.* How? It's already

been said. First close all the gaps: with regard to basics such as food, health, shelter and human dignity we need to ensure that all Australians – Indigenous, non-Indigenous, refugee, recent immigrant, young, old, male, female and all shades of gender in between have that simple beautiful thing called basic equality.

As far as the arts specifically go, I think we could all really usefully take a leaf out of the AFL's book. The care, counselling and respect that those teams put into fresh Indigenous footballers puts us in the arts to shame. Not only are they better at spotting new talent, but better at caring for it as well, and throwing vast amounts of money into their equivalent of research and development – along with fabulous leadership from the top and many of their peers. We pretty much exploit the art and leave the artist to fend for themselves don't we?

So let's say we do all that. I think we already have it in some places – a new album by Gurrumul Yunupingu or Jessica Mauboy, a new film by Warwick Thornton, new designs by countless young clothing, jewellery and graphic designers: all these are now anticipated with excitement and pleasure and have a growing international reputation. Consumerism is very healthy. Let's promote this for all artforms, the ephemeral as well as the solid and saleable, for all the things our people do as creative individuals to stimulate our brains and our own individual and collective creative muscle. Let's make sure that at each new grand occasion there are new commissions, of music, big paintings or public art, new dance as well as traditional welcoming ceremony, not just covers or copies.

Two or three hundred years ago a European emperor wouldn't be caught dead without commissioning new

music for a state banquet. Why can't we be like that? At big occasions now we're *still* playing the same music those very emperors commissioned!

As Mandawuy Yunupingu has said in his wisdom today, the past is important. Preserving heritage, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, is necessary so we are not ignorant of the history and development of culture – *but never at the expense of adventures in the new*. Unless we continue to encourage our citizens to dream not only the impossible dreams they can already envision, but also to value those who dream beyond what we already know and create an environment where those experiments, processes and risks in art are admired and praised, then we will be short-changing the vision of a unique Australian culture that we can all share, and one which is as strong, clever, innovative, positive and resilient as the one that has welcomed us here today.