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General background to the growth of Regional Galleries in Australia, and the formation in particular of the Regional Galleries Association within the State of New South Wales.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to apologise for not giving my talk in the host's language, but I think it will be easier for the translator to deal with my Kangaroo English than my Kangaroo French...in any case my paper is relatively short. It is divided into two parts; a general outline of the growth of Regional Galleries in Australia, and the formation of the Regional Galleries Assoc. in the State of N.S.W. I have listened with interest to the former paper from our colleague from the United States, and while there are many similarities of background between the problems of establishing Regional Galleries in both our countries, eg. vast distances between capital cities of cultural activity, as well as similar advantages, eg. common language and national identity over those vast distances...while these common factors apply, the rate of population growth and decentralisation has historically been that much more recent in Australia, that one might say that Australia is at the kindergarden stage of what America has become. Yet within this simpler framework, many of the problems as discussed by the French delegates (within their more competitive support structure), have in Australia been organically, if not always smoothly, absorbed. Why has this occurred? Because, I believe in Australia the difference is that the growth of Regional Galleries is essentially a grass-roots movement, springing out of a real need affirmed by local population, encouraged but not imposed by a cultural hierarchy, and fulfilling a social as much as an aesthetic role. I will return to this point later in more detail. When I speak of Regional Galleries I am alluding to public galleries in the outer-city suburbs and in the country areas. But it is particularly the latter, ie. the country areas outside a radius which in Europe would constitute the boundary of another country...it is within these areas with a population of between 30,000 and 300,000 where growth has appeared phenomenal, and with few exceptions within the last five years.

Two factors have contributed to this. Firstly, the changing character of the decentralised outer-city and country towns, which has taken place in the post-war years, and secondly, increased government priority for the support and encouragement of the arts. This began 14 years ago under a Liberal/Federal government and achieved a further thrust forward in the early '70's, when the Labour Government under Whitlam, sought to upgrade the cultural image of Australia internationally by the purchase of Jackson Pollack's Blue Poles, at the highest price yet paid in Australia for a contemporary work of art. Criticism and controversy ensued, but it brought in its wake a steady stream of expatriate artists returning home to what was taking on the appearance of a favourable artistic climate, and a general upsurge in the art market.

It is necessary to make clear that there are three levels of government in Australia, Federal, State and Local, each with their own degree of autonomy within the hierarchy. At the Federal level, with regards to the establishment of Regional Galleries, no financial responsibility is specifically assumed; although under special circumstances, funding in the form of special grants may be forthcoming upon application. At the State level, government support for Regional Galleries is at the behest of the elected Premiers of each State and therefore can vary from one to the other. For example, in the State of N.S.W. funding for the construction and staffing of Regional Galleries results from a dollar to dollar grant being given from the Premier's Dept. to match the amount provided by Local Government, ie. the governing body directly responsible for that area where the Regional Gallery is, or is proposed to be built.

However it must be emphatically stated that the initiative has first to come from Local Government...with the support of the State Government acting as a catalyst. In other words although money is made available from the State Government, the project of establishing and running a Regional Gallery must stem from a community inspired enterprise, and must be shouldered as a community commitment. Such community commitment is allied to the emergence of a stronger sense of civic independence which occurred as country towns "came to life"

in the post-war years.

And so I return to my earlier points, the changing character of decentralised country towns and the fact that Regional Galleries fulfil a social as much as an aesthetic need. Beyond the bustling urban capital centres of Australia, which exist on the coastal fringe of this island continent, the outlying towns in a network of widening distances and empty rural spaces, support isolated pockets of population, which have a long history of social and cultural deprivation. Due to historical reasons Australia, unlike Europe, had no large art collections to draw upon, or to inspire the building of provincial galleries to house them. In the '40's and the '50's, country areas were intermittently served by State Government touring exhibitions organised by the State Museums in each capital city. These were displayed in the local Council Chambers or the local Community Hall. Apart from such special events (which vied in popularity with the local horse race meeting), cultural life was often generated by a single civic spirited individual, or by small groups which grew together for sociable reasons; eg. the Arts and Craft Society, or the local Dramatic Society. Perhaps the foundation for country communities desiring to establish their own art gallery can be attributed to these early touring shows, which offered a sporadic taste for culture; or it could just as well be that tough sense of self-reliance, bred of isolation, which inspired a determined civic pride to put their town "on the map".

But there were also other pragmatic reasons. After the war country towns experienced a great increase in population (due in some measure to a more liberal immigration policy being introduced by the Federal Government). The economic expansion and greater affluence which followed, combined with an increase in life-style expectations, which in the '60's made itself felt through the whole of society in Australia. Road, rail and air transport had been upgraded and expanded decreasing distances and broadening mental horizons. A population gradually evolved that was more multi-national, more receptive to cultural stimulation and more eager to make a common effort to achieve it.

The post-war growth in the art teaching profession also proved significant. Where before it had been an exception in many country towns to employ a special art teacher in the local schools, in the '40's a totally revised education curriculum elevated the study of the arts, and the addition of a special art teacher in country areas gradually became the rule. At the same time saw the emergence of advanced colleges of education, teacher training centres and universities in the country towns, and this brought via their teaching staffs, contact with educators from capital city centres.

Local Government participation in support of the arts was encouraged not only by civic pride, but because certain other advantages were evident. Competition developed between country towns to attract people to settle there, and the position of layman trustee, which inevitably contained a certain proportion of prominent local business people, also implied the role of leading citizen. In this mutually supportive situation, the State Government also recognised the chance to attract votes for the Labour Party (in office in N.S.W.) against a long entrenched Country Party constituency.

Against this background in 1972, the N.S.W. Regional Galleries Association was formed, to represent the interests of its members. The Ministry of Cultural Activities, through the Premier's Dept. made funds available for this inaugural meeting, but the 15 founding members, through their delegates, all represented their Municipal Councils in an honorary capacity. From its inception the Association was founded as a co-operative organization with the aim of establishing a network of professionally managed galleries across the State of N.S.W. They were dedicated to conserve, collect and exhibit for the education and enjoyment of the public. After 5 years of lobbying by the Association, the N.S.W. Government agreed to provide Local Government with direct access to State Government funding on a dollar to dollar basis for their galleries, art collections and professional salaries.

As far as the Regional Galleries Association was concerned, in 1979 the Premier of N.S.W. agreed to fund the salary of a full time executive officer and in 1980, the half-salary of a Conservation officer (in this case the remaining half salary

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was obtained from special funding from the Federal Government).

During the past decade the number of Regional Galleries in N.S.W. has increased from 4 to 18, and this year for the first time the majority of Regional Galleries in N.S.W. are employing professional staff in managerial positions. Although the State Government has injected substantial sums of money, the major contributions for Regional art projects and activities still comes from Local Government and the local community. For example, the town of Armidale, which is perhaps a special case as it is a University town, in northern N.S.W., with a population of 20,000, raised \$800,000 in 3 years by public appeal. The specific motivation in this case was the gift of two major collections bequeathed by local residences; one of early Australian art and the other a contemporary collection, but both of historical interest and considerable value.

The collections of Regional Galleries have gradually expanded by acquisitions from firstly, the annual ^{LOCAL} art award exhibition which has become a feature of country life (Australia offers an exceedingly high number of art competitions with prizes donated by business corporations as well as local Council bodies), secondly by purchases, and thirdly by private bequests. In regard to the latter, the Regional Galleries Association is currently concerned with the formation of a Company and Trust. The Trust will accord the Association, tax exemption status as a non-profit cultural foundation for gifts, bequests, donations and grants made for the benefit of the members' aims, projects and activities.

Often interesting old collections appear unexpectedly in rural areas when the pastoralist dies. If there is no concerted effort or offer made to hold the collection together (as for example the ^{local} Regional Gallery), it often gets lost under the auctioneer's hammer. The Director of each Regional Gallery has the full responsibility for the exhibition and acquisition policy of his or her gallery. The level of interest in craft in country districts is high, and this is born in mind when formulating an exhibition program...for one of the

as a Community Centre for the arts. In a word, the policy strives to be inclusive...to bring experiences from outside into the life of the town, to attract and interact.

For that reason new Regional Galleries are designed to be anti-monumental in appearance. The internal space should ideally be flexible, to be used also as a venue for the performing arts, for concerts and as a meeting place. Lectures from visiting artists, seminars and educational activities, set within a social framework of the local Art Gallery Society, are encouraged, so that the sense of community involvement is maintained. Directors of different galleries often work in groups to exchange exhibitions, and negotiations are on a very personal level. The reputation of the Director is important, i.e. his or her ability to care for and display the works to advantage. There are 50 public galleries in Australia, and in spite of great distances in travel, every effort is made to keep contact through organized general meetings and conferences.

The majority of Regional Galleries in Australia are distinctly different from the Museums of Europe, in so far as they place emphasis on exhibiting other than their own collection. Operating in this community generated context, they consistently base their activities on the premise that art is made by people and art galleries are made for people. While the annual art award, judged often by the visiting art critic from the Big Smoke, may not reflect popular opinion, it is duly respected, and the continual increase in gallery attendance numbers, that all Regional Galleries seem to show, testifies to the validity of the enterprise.

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