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## SELF-GOVERNMENT AND THE ARTS

The changes wrought by self-government on Canberra's developing arts community, beginning in mid-1989 when the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Legislative Assembly convened the first of two select committees, were extraordinary. The transfer from national control to emancipation over three years transformed Canberra's culture and yielded a new spirit of connectedness. Infrastructure that was enabled by the visionary decision to allocate the one-off \$19 million casino premium to the arts also transformed the city's landscape and enabled a decade of unparalleled growth, particularly in local visual arts.

In this chapter I make a close analysis of the major enquiries tasked with investigating and reporting on the capacity and desires of the arts and culture communities in the ACT: the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities (final report delivered June 1991); and the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure (*Inquiry into the possible use of the \$19 million casino premium*, delivered December 1992). Their ambitions and recommendations reflect a greatly changed perception of the position of local arts and culture in Canberra and a powerful commitment to privileging its development.

My analysis allows a comparison of two extraordinarily different decades. The methodologically flawed Pascoe Report of 1985 was intrinsically connected to the idea of local arts and culture in Canberra as a representation of national capital space; its recommendations proved entirely out of step with the reality of local needs. By contrast, the final committee

reports of the early 1990s resulted from an intense period of community consultation. Their focus and recommendations acknowledged local arts and culture as an increasingly dominant feature of Canberra life.

The ACT Legislative Assembly's commitment to the arts came at a time when demand for resources outstripped current models of funding and other support. By 1989 the arts funding model in the ACT was broken. During the 1980s, the sector's escalating demand for scarce resources was met by responses from a local government with limited self-determination. While increasingly willing, local government was simply unable to meet and effectively manage growing demand. As the decade came to an end, of most concern was the lack of a model to ensure sustainable future planning. Providing for generational growth was uppermost in the minds of assembly members.

## Steps to self-government

The first request for self-government – a 'right [that] has long been recognised as an inherent part of British citizenship'<sup>1</sup> – was made in the Federal Capital Territory Representation League's pre-petition to parliament in November 1927 'praying for representation in the House of Representatives and on the Federal Capital Commission'.<sup>2</sup> Self-determination remained on the agenda, with debate varying in intensity as the Territory's fortunes seesawed through cataclysmic world affairs and changes in federal governments and Commonwealth administrative bodies. By 1978, however, with the national capital's 218,000 citizens enjoying some of the lowest costs of living in Australia, 63.75 per cent<sup>3</sup> of the eligible population voted in a plebiscite for a continuation of the Commonwealth's 'benign dictatorship'.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of this, the Commonwealth determined to divest itself of the financial responsibility for local services and commenced the task of bringing together the various departments responsible for managing the

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1 *Canberra Times*, 'Petitions to parliament: voice in local affairs: seat in parliament', 1 November 1927, p 4.

2 *Canberra Times*, 1 November 1927.

3 When calculated as a proportion of the eligible voting population, 63.75 per cent equalled 69,893 persons voting against self-government and 30.54 per cent, or 33,480, voting in favour of self-government.

4 Bill Wood, Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, Australian Capital Territory, 26 August 2004, p 4323.

ACT, in order to ascertain the costs of its maintenance. By the late 1980s, with the population approaching 280,000, preparations were complete. On 6 December 1988, the Governor-General of Australia signed off on bills that began a three-year transfer from full federal control and funding to standalone local self-government under an ACT Legislative Assembly.

The first elections for the ACT Legislative Assembly were held on 4 March 1989. Residents elected a minority Labor government under Chief Minister Rosemary Follett, with the Assembly's first meeting held on 11 May. The National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) was dismantled and planning responsibilities were divided between the NCDC's replacement, the National Capital Planning Authority (NCPA to 1996; National Capital Authority (NCA) thereafter), and the ACT Legislative Assembly. The former retained control over planning and continued funding those areas of Canberra the Griffin Plan categorised as national capital space; the ACT Legislative Assembly assumed planning and funding control of the remainder, including of local arts and cultural endeavours.

Self-government brought hope and a sense of cohesion to the Canberra arts community. From the earliest days the community – led by Canberra School of Art's head David Williams and the Labor Assembly member Bill Wood – was intent on refocusing the debate from its previously narrow focus on grant funding to the broad holistic development, including generational development, of arts and cultural planning, and the building of arts and community cultural infrastructure. Although Wood recalled that 'the first years ... were marked by an Assembly whose members were, in the early days, not in favour of self-government',<sup>5</sup> there were, from the beginning, strong indications of bipartisan support for local arts.

Committees played a central part in the next three years of intense research and planning around arts and cultural development. Among the many that were established by the Legislative Assembly from the end of 1989 onwards were the Select Committee on the Establishment of a Casino, the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities and the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure. The work of these committees specifically affected forward planning for arts and culture.

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5 Wood, 2004, p 4328.

The decision to allocate funding revenue via the casino premium radically altered the face of arts infrastructure in the city for the benefit of local practitioners and consumers, and the pleasure of national and international visitors. There was a modest precedent. Throughout the 1980s, taxes accrued from gambling in the ACT had allowed funding, via the ACT Community Development Fund (CDF), of modest equipment and employment needs for arts and cultural projects, and community and sporting organisations. This new initiative, however, was unparalleled in terms of the amount of funding it made available to the local arts sector. Successive ACT governments committed to allocating \$19 million, payable as a one-off premium from the successful bidder for the proposed Canberra casino, to fund community cultural infrastructure projects. These projects conclusively altered Canberra's landscape and raised expectations about the importance of culture in a modern city.

## The Select Committee on the Establishment of a Casino

The inaugural ACT Legislative Assembly convened the Select Committee on the Establishment of a Casino in its first sitting month. This was a strong indication of the government's commitment to swift action and decision-making. It was the first of a number of select committees addressing arts and culture and the casino premium. It commenced in May 1989 and reported to the Assembly in July 1989. The ACT's first government (Labor; May–December 1989) provided a submission to the committee in which it confirmed the government's commitment to using the one-off premium obtained from the commercial site for the 'funding of facilities which could include a Theatre complex, Territorial Library and other community and cultural facilities'.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, the Alliance government (December 1989 – June 1991) affirmed, in May 1991, the use of the casino premium for community facilities.<sup>7</sup> The second Labor government – with Bill Wood as the minister for education and the arts – reiterated the government's commitment in December 1991 and, again,

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6 Quoted in *Select Committee on the Establishment of a Casino*, Canberra, Legislative Assembly for the ACT, July 1989, p 3.

7 Quoted in Standing Committee on Planning Development and Infrastructure, *Inquiry into the possible use of the \$19 million casino premium, report no 9*, Legislative Assembly for the ACT, December 1992, p 6.

on re-election in April, and a further time in October 1992, when Chief Minister Follett assured the Assembly that the casino premium would be ‘applied to community facilities in the ACT, specifically cultural and heritage facilities’.<sup>8</sup>

The proposed casino was intended for the area known as Section 19, Civic, which housed the Canberra Theatre Centre (CTC). The committee recommended that, along with the proposed casino, community facilities be enabled on the site, writing that, ‘an idealised community facility would include a lyric theatre (2,000 seats), play house, performance studio, library, regional art gallery, heritage centre, civic square upgrade, infrastructure and car parking’.<sup>9</sup>

## The Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities

With these basic recommendations in place, the government determined to enter into an extended period of research. The Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities was convened on 23 August 1989, with Wood, whom the arts community already ‘regarded as one of their own’, as chair.<sup>10</sup>

Over 22 months of intense community consultation, the committee received 58 submissions from groups and individuals; heard evidence from 66 witnesses over nine days of public hearings; inspected and met arts administrators and the directors of various state libraries, art galleries, museums and theatre complexes in Brisbane, Melbourne and Hobart; and investigated theatre complexes in Geelong and Adelaide, regional galleries in Orange and Wollongong, and municipal libraries and regional galleries in Bathurst and Goulburn. The committee convened a public seminar on 8 September 1990, held ‘in the interests of widening the debate on the need for a State art gallery’,<sup>11</sup> which brought government

8 Reply to question put on notice, 21 October 1992 (quoted in Standing Committee on Planning Development and Infrastructure, 1992, p 6).

9 Quoted in Select Committee on the Establishment of a Casino, 1989, p 16.

10 Robert Macklin, ‘Cultural scene transformed under council’, *Canberra Times*, 21 November 1991, p 5. The committee’s other two members included Hector Kinloch and William (Bill) Stefaniak.

11 Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, *Final report*, Legislative Assembly for the ACT, June 1991, p 5.

officials, major arts groups and private gallery owners together. By the end of this exhaustive process, Wood was able to claim that 'there is not an Arts group or a related group in Canberra ... that we did not approach'.<sup>12</sup>

This unprecedented engagement with the community across every sector, organisation and many individuals was followed up with informed, intelligent analysis. Wood's driving passion for the arts in the ACT, his ability to effect government decisions and his desire to understand the sector's present needs and to engage in visionary planning enabled insightful conclusions. Delivered to the Assembly in June 1991, the committee's final report provided, as he recalled it, 'the basis for a lot of later activity'.<sup>13</sup> More than this, it marked the beginning of long-term, locally managed, broad arts and cultural planning, the benefits of which extended across subsequent decades.

The final report comprised 74 recommendations across 10 areas. The first related to overall arts funding, where the committee recommended 'that funding increase in real terms by 10% per annum'<sup>14</sup> over the period from 1992 to 1997. This proved impossible to implement then or at any time since.

Of particular importance were recommendations 2–35 that concerned the establishment of a Territorial library, museum and art gallery in a purpose-built facility in Section 19. The report proposed that this lead to the repurposing of Civic Square as a cultural precinct comprising cultural and commercial undertakings.

The literary arts were dealt with in recommendations 36–41.<sup>15</sup> The performing arts were covered in recommendations 42–59, with a caveat stressing the need for 'a new model of consultation ... for the effective development of the performing arts in the ACT'.<sup>16</sup> Recommendations 60 and 61 concerned community art, with 62–68 encompassing education and youth arts, and 69–74 covering advocacy,

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12 Bill Wood, Hansard, Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, Australian Capital Territory, 22 October 1992, p 2874.

13 Wood, 1992, p 4328.

14 Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, 1991, p xiii.

15 Specific recommendations involved a significant increase in overall funding for literature, the establishment of the ACT Writers Centre in the Civic Square redevelopment, the establishment of funding and support for writers-in-residence programs, the funding of a community literature coordinator, and increased support for the Australian National Word Festival.

16 Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, 1991, p 57.

bureaucracy, consultation and development. These sections display consistent evidence of a deep engagement with the arts sector, with recommendations that reflect the desires of that community.

The report's preface, authored by Wood, identified matters requiring urgent attention. The first of these, the immediate establishment of a cultural council 'to improve administration and planning and to provide a more powerful voice for the arts',<sup>17</sup> was made after the committee considered other models, including retaining the Arts Development Board (ADB). The second recommended the consolidation of all arts-related government agencies within one ministry. Both stemmed from the committee's belief that, having examined 'a great range of evidence that makes it feel very positive' it nevertheless had:

some apprehension about the present administration of the arts in the ACT both in terms of funding and policy development. This apprehension in no way stems from the individuals involved with arts administration in Canberra. The committee's reservations emerge from the observation that the needs of arts development in the region have outstripped the original models set up to service the arts.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the recommendation from the Select Committee on the Establishment of a Casino, and the submissions supporting the construction of a new 2,000-seat lyric theatre, the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities determined that this expenditure was unwarranted, given the steady losses accumulated over a number of years by the CTC. Instead, in its third urgent recommendation, the committee advised that construction immediately begin on a community theatre in the Childers Street area. This 250-seat theatre, sited on the corner of Childers Street and University Avenue and renamed the Street Theatre, was completed in 1994. For over 20 years, the theatre has undergone several changes in management and style, but has remained a critical partner for Canberra's performing arts.

The urgent recommendation to set up a cultural council was enacted five months after the committee's final report was delivered to the Assembly. Like the Australia Council, the 15-member peak body was composed entirely of arts peers who aimed to 'promote the development and

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17 Bill Wood, Preface, Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, 1991, p v.

18 Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, 1991, p 84.

continued growth of a creative, diverse and dynamic cultural sector in the ACT'.<sup>19</sup> The ADB was disbanded and replaced on 20 November 1991 with the ACT Cultural Council (1991–2013).<sup>20</sup> Williams, who was most recent head of the ADB, became the council's chair. The Cultural Council's formation was driven by Williams and Wood, and it answered the need, first voiced by the arts community in the mid-1980s, for long-term planning that was managed by community members. When announcing the council, Wood overtly recognised local artists and performers, thanking them 'for the essential spirit and vitality that they give to us all'. 'They should,' he said, 'take a bow.'<sup>21</sup>

Williams and Wood were powerful collaborators in the transformation of Canberra's arts culture from being a function of the national capital space to a vibrant expression of local community. Williams, who was previously director of the Australia Council's Crafts Board (1978–85), brought his considerable experience in infrastructure building to the table. Wood's impact on arts and culture development, from self-government until his retirement in 2004, cannot be overstated. In the second Follett Labor ministry he held the first designated arts and heritage portfolio, as well as the portfolio of planning. These concurrent portfolios enabled him to oversee the development of the Heritage Council and to identify and secure sites for arts facilities development. These included the Australian National Capital Artists (ANCA) artist studios in Mitchell in 1991 and ANCA artist studios and gallery in Dickson in November 1992. Canberra sculptor Jan Brown was a tireless advocate for the ANCA studios. In 1995, Wood was able to secure a permanent home for Canberra Contemporary Art Space (CCAS) Gallery 3 in the newly redeveloped commercial offices at Manuka, on the block that had housed Bitumen River Gallery (BRG).

The Cultural Council comprised two sets of committees: the Artform committees in visual arts, theatre, music, dance, literature, and – eventually – film, which considered all grant applications; and the Opportunities committee that considered entrepreneurial opportunities for the arts within the individual practices committees. The council strived for a holistic approach to overall arts and cultural development, with chairs of all committees involved in negotiating the best grant applications in terms of the overall development of the ACT arts and cultural landscape.

19 Bill Wood, quoted in Macklin, 1991, p 5.

20 The ADB presided over the \$1.7 million in ACT government grants available from 1989.

21 Wood, quoted in Macklin, 1991, p 5.

The arts community was made aware of committee members, and members assessing grant applications were invited to see the work of companies/artists. This assisted with continued analysis of the sector and ensured feedback to applicants. Among the council's briefs was to seek multi-year funding for arts organisations through closer cooperation with the Australia Council. Analogous with bureaucratisation, this conversely assisted in reducing the administration associated with yearly grant applications and allowed planning beyond a 12-month period, thus answering a need that was first voiced in 1984.

## Other initiatives

Important early initiatives from local government included a requirement that passed the Assembly in 1990 to include local art in all new buildings, and the establishment of a \$15,000 ACT Literary Fellowship (1991–95), advocated by Canberra author Sara Dowse.

Community initiatives included the inauguration of the Canberra Critics Circle, convened in 1991 by Helen Musa. Critics across the art forms determined to vote every year, not for the 'best' in any category, but for those performances and exhibitions that stimulated the critic's imagination. In the same year, the Circle initiated the *Canberra Times* Artist of the Year award. In announcing the award, *Canberra Times* managing director Ian Meikle recognised the 'tremendous range and depth of artistic talent [that] contributes enormously to the quality of life in the national capital ... a contribution which should be recognised and rewarded'.<sup>22</sup> The *Canberra Times* appointment of an arts editor and the paper's contribution to the arts in the ACT was recognised in the final report from the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities:

The *Canberra Times* remains one of the most effective agents in the ACT for disseminating information about activities in the arts. Its regular and thorough coverage of the cultural life of the Territory is of enormous benefit to participants and audiences alike. The arts could not function effectively without this outstanding level of support.<sup>23</sup>

22 Ian Meikle, 'Times backs artist award', *Canberra Times*, 17 August 1991, p 3.

23 Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, 1991, section 12.26, p 89. The *Canberra Times* was considered a great supporter of the arts well into the 2000s. More recent changes in ownership and staff brought a decrease in the coverage of local arts.

Canberra Arts Marketing (CAM) was another government-funded initiative that showed a commitment to modest developments benefiting the broad arts community. The small organisation was established in 1993 with Elizabeth Brown at its head. As local arts and cultural activity increased rapidly over the next decade, CAM kept its members apprised of each other's openings and events through an increasingly necessary arts calendar. From visual arts openings to orchestral presentations, CAM assisted, in its first decade, in cohering the sector by generating a powerful sense of local place.<sup>24</sup>

In the same year the term *cultural capital*, used to refer to Canberra as a city of culture and first coined in print by Williams, entered local language.<sup>25</sup> This highly significant adoption indicated that Canberrans had begun to see themselves as the drivers and providers of a vibrant local arts milieu. That the term was coined by the same lobbying body that was seeking validation and resources to grow local arts for the benefit of the local and regional communities is indicative of a vigorous surge towards a cultural future.

## The Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure

The second relevant committee, the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure was directed, in October 1992, to 'investigate and report on recommendations to the Assembly of the possible use of the \$19 million casino premium, having regard to both the June 1991 report of the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, and the government's stated objective to commit the funds to cultural facilities'.<sup>26</sup> The government reminded the committee that these objectives

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24 By 2008, with the rapid uptake of social media communications across the arts in Canberra, government withdrew funding and the organisation folded.

25 David Williams in Robert Macklin, 'Cultural capital of Australia?', *Canberra Times*, 29 July 1990, p 17.

26 *Minutes of Proceedings*, 2nd Assembly, 22 October 1992 in *Report no. 9* of the Standing Committee on Planning Development and Infrastructure, Dec 1992, p iii. Established on 27 March 1992, this ACT-wide committee examined 'matters related to planning, land management, transport, economic development, commercial development, industrial and residential development, infrastructure and capital works, science and technology' (*Minutes of Proceedings*, 2nd Assembly, 27 March 1992 in *Report no. 9* of the Standing Committee on Planning Development and Infrastructure, Dec 1992, p iii). Committee members were David Lamont, Trevor Kaine, Tony De Domenico, Annette Ellis and Helen Szuty.

‘have a long background and cover successive ACT Administrations’.<sup>27</sup> The committee was directed to report to the Legislative Assembly by 10 December 1992.<sup>28</sup> Public comment was sought, through local press advertisements, by 11 November. The committee heard 37 individuals and received 68 written submissions and ‘numerous telephone calls’.<sup>29</sup> A public hearing on 13 November was attended by representatives of 20 arts organisations.

The impact of the report was stunning. The cost of all requests, excluding un-costed submissions, totalled \$177,502,867. The many community submissions indicated peoples’ ability to think large when given the opportunity to take part in generational planning. The committee’s final recommendations reflected the breadth of community submissions over the two major enquiries. Their implementation over the next decade and beyond indicated the commitment of successive governments to supporting local arts and culture.

The recommendations were that:

- ‘\$2.5 million ... be allocated to assist in the provision of an Aboriginal Keeping Place/cultural centre ... as proposed by the Ngunnawal aboriginal people and the Bogong Regional Council’ (3.10, p 28)
- ‘a trust arrangement along the lines discussed in this report be established to hold \$2.75 million ... pending the development of appropriate plans for regional facilities. These plans should result from extensive community consultation and negotiation, and take account of the diverse range of community and school-based needs that are demonstrated in the submissions to this inquiry’ (3.22, p 31)
- ‘the Government vary its land use policies in the Childers Street/Kingsley Street area to promote a mix of cultural and commercial activities’ (3.33, p 34)
- ‘\$250,000 ... be allocated to equip the new community theatre on the corner of University Avenue and Childers Street, City’ (3.37, p 35)

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27 *Standing Committee on Planning Development and Infrastructure*, 1992, p 5.

28 *Standing Committee on Planning Development and Infrastructure*, 1992, p 3.

29 *Standing Committee on Planning Development and Infrastructure*, 1992, p 1.

- '\$5 million ... be allocated to upgrading the Playhouse Theatre to a 600–650 seat theatre ... and \$7 million be devoted to providing a cultural and heritage facility in the city centre ... either in the North Building of Civic Square or in the Childers Street/Kingsley Street area' (3.43, p 38)
- 'the Government facilitate the provision of space in the Kingston Foreshores area for visual and community performing artists, it being recognised that such space is provided on an interim basis pending the finalisation of plans for the whole Foreshores area' (3.48, p 39)
- '\$1.5 million ... be devoted to the NATEX [National Exhibition Centre] site to provide for essential maintenance and a basic refurbishment program' (3.26, p 33).

Several recommendations of the report from the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, delivered in June 1991, were enacted prior to the release of report no 9 of the Standing Committee on Planning Development and Infrastructure in December 1992. These included the establishment of the ACT Cultural Council, the beginnings of construction on what would become the Street Theatre in Childers Street (that street identified in June 1991 by the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities as a second area for cultural development), and the re-siting of the casino from its first proposed site in Civic Square to its present location at the eastern city edge.

Decisions flowing from the recommendations of both enquiries resulted in rapid growth across the sector. By 1994, two ACT Cultural Council project rounds each year were attracting 'up to 190 applications in an extremely competitive and vibrant arts scene'.<sup>30</sup> The perennial shortfall of available grant monies in this climate of rapidly increasing activity saw the arts community in turmoil once again following the council's announcement of funding for the 1995 year with a total of \$1.8 million distributed. This was only \$100,000 more than the \$1.7 million distributed by the ADB in 1989. Council's then chairman, Richard Refshauge, reported that money:

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30 Evol McLeod, chair, Practices Committee, 1994–97, interview with the author, 12 August 2015.

was extremely tight. In the past members were not fighting over particular projects. This time it would not be putting it too highly to say that they [members of council] were almost traumatised by the lack of available funds for good projects.<sup>31</sup>

In mid-1994, however, \$108,000, 'designed to provide flexibility to arts clients',<sup>32</sup> was expended in 16 second-round grants for the period 1 August – 31 December. That these were, in the main, awarded to visual artists indicates a clear recognition of growth and response to the needs of this sector of the arts.

The realisation of successive local governments' visions for local arts and ambitious building programs manifested throughout the 1990s. In 1994, the Legislative Assembly moved to the South Building in Civic Square. *Ethos*, the Tom Bass sculpture erected in 1960 as a vision of a cultured national capital, then sat outside the front doors of the Assembly. In 1997, with the opening of Canberra Museum and Gallery (CMAG) approaching, a separate line in the ACT Government budget established the Cultural Facilities Corporation. This was given responsibility for the CTC, and for heritage cultural arts sites that included Lanyon Homestead, Calthorpes' House, and CMAG (then under construction). In 1998, CMAG was opened on the ground floor of the North Building in Civic Square, directly facing the Legislative Assembly, with the Craft Council and multicultural spaces housed above. The ACT Writers Centre, a principal recommendation from the Literature section of the 1991 Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities final report, was located in the Gorman House Arts Centre. The need for a Territory-focused library was largely overtaken by emerging technology that allowed online catalogue research between specialist Canberra collections held by the ACT Heritage Library, the National Library of Australia, the National Gallery of Australia Research Library and the many university libraries across the city. The opening of the Civic branch of Libraries ACT in Civic Square in 2006 signalled the completion of the vision that emerged in the first months of self-government for a cultural precinct that included a theatre complex, a Territory museum and gallery, Craft ACT and a library housed together within Civic Square.

31 Robert Macklin, 'Turmoil in ACT Arts', *Canberra Times*, 19 November 1994, p 3.

32 Helen Musa, '\$108 thousand in grants for arts: Wood', *Canberra Times*, 21 July 1994, p 6.

The \$19 million casino premium, which had bipartisan support within successive ACT governments for the provision of arts and cultural infrastructure, funded the Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Yarramundi Reach on Canberra's southern edge ('Keeping Place/Cultural Centre' in the original recommendation), Street Theatre, Hawker College Theatre, the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) music campus in Woden, and the completion of the Tuggeranong Arts Centre. This latter, the first of Canberra's suburban community arts centres, was allocated funding of \$4.183 million in 1987/88.<sup>33</sup> Over the next four years, a number of enquiries and steering committees were engaged in attempting to move the project through to architectural drawings. The centre finally opened in 1998.

The recommendations from both inquiries exemplify a quantum change in the government's perception of local arts and culture, indicating an increased level of respect for the wider arts community, as well as a clear understanding that the time had come to privilege local arts and culture. Over the decade, a rapid growth in arts activity resulted from the combination of successive willing governments and peer-supported, sector-directed planning, coupled with the growth of arts infrastructure. As the decade progressed, the visual arts – which from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s had struggled under the powerful federal rhetoric of national excellence in flagship performing arts companies – came to be perceived as equally important to the performing arts in the ACT.

The reports that anchored their respective decades of the 1980s and the 1990s – the Pascoe Report (1985), the Final Report of the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities (1991), and its follow-on report from the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure (1992) – paint a remarkably different picture of Canberra. The Pascoe Report was compiled by a consultant whose most recent position as head of the Australia Council meant he appeared to be the best prospect for the job – that is, to ascertain the way forward for arts and culture in the national capital. But Pascoe, in privileging national capital space over the local, misread both the nature of place and the powerful desire of local practitioners to drive their own future. In contrast, the findings and recommendations in the final report of the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities were made following an unprecedented

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33 ACT Government, *ACT budget paper no 6, 1987/88*, Canberra, Government Printer, 1988, p 35.

level of community consultation. Many direct quotes from community members are scattered throughout the report, illustrating the committee's conclusions and indicating the depth of engagement undertaken by the committee and the seriousness with which the stated needs and indeed the cultural dreams of the community were taken. In them, civic pride was seen as stemming from local practice – in service to a city whose identity was culturally separate from the functions of national capital space, and where local arts practice was increasingly regarded as a dominant feature of Canberra life.

Additionally, many of the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Planning, Development and Infrastructure report, which clearly took into account the final report of the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities, continued to be activated over the next 25 years. This long-term fulfilment of the various recommendations stands as a testament to the original depth of arts community engagement over the first years of self-government, to the intelligent and far-sighted submissions by the broader arts community to these major committees of enquiry, and to the commitment of successive local governments to growing the sector.

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