



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
VICTORIA

## **VICTORIAN ARTISTS' SOCIETY MORNING TEA**

**Tuesday 19th February, 2019**

**Ms Eileen Mackley AM FVAS**, President, Victorian Artists' Society

**All distinguished guests**

First, I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land upon which we are gathering and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and to any Elders here with us this morning.

Tony joins me in welcoming you all to Government House today.

Living in what is often referred to as the 'Creative State', we are well aware that the Victorian Artists' Society is one of the great contributors to that proud claim.

After all, for nearly a century and a half, the Society has been a home to many of Victoria's most eminent artists. Artists such as Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin and Walter Withers, to name just a few.

It has not only nurtured our State's creative talent, but also the development of a remarkable Victorian artistic aesthetic. An aesthetic which, through Australian Impressionism, saw artists pioneering a new way to look at and record our landscape's beauty, strangeness and harshness. And a new way to revel in the colours, textures and experiences of our environment.

This Society has also helped to cultivate artistic appreciation amongst Victorian audiences, through its regular exhibits and workshops.

The fact that our National Gallery of Victoria is now the 16<sup>th</sup> most visited gallery in the world has not happened in isolation from this wider appreciation that Victorians have learned.

Standing here in this beautiful State Drawing Room, it is a nice thought that the history of the Victorian Artists' Society runs parallel to the history of Government House.

We are of the same vintage.

The Victorian Artists' Society was formed in 1870, just two years before construction began here.

In 1892, my predecessor, (Victoria's 8<sup>th</sup> Governor), His Excellency the Right Honourable the Earl of Hopetoun GCMG, opened your Albert Street building.

But the favours go both ways. The works of many of your impressive alumni grace the walls of Government House, thanks to the generosity of our NGV.

In this room alone, Walter Withers, Frederick McCubbin, Arthur Streeton and James Quinn are represented. (I am sure that, a little later, my husband will tell you one of his favourite stories about Quinn's Madame Recamier. And another about Streeton's 'Land of the Golden Fleece'.)

When you see the collection of 'ladies' hanging in the State Dining Room – and, perhaps it is not mere coincidence that the first female Governor has those women collected there – you will see that each one of them has a Victorian Artists' Society link through Rupert Bunny, Violet Teague, Hugh Ramsay, and – again – McCubbin.

In fact, Rupert Bunny's 1902 portrait of our State's iconic operatic diva, Dame Nellie Melba, is another feature of the connection between Government House – where she frequently performed – and the VAS building, which hosted her Conservatorium for many years.

I'd encourage you all to take a stroll through the State Apartments to admire the many works completed by members of the Victorian Artists' Society.

As your Patrons in Chief, we thank the Society for all that it has contributed to the State of Victoria.

In particular, we acknowledge your President, Eileen Mackley AM, for the leadership and vision she has contributed. It is a pleasure to welcome her back to Government House, after she was invested here as a Member of the Order of Australia just late last year.

We thank all those too who have worked and volunteered for the Society to ensure that it has continued to flourish across so many years.

How fitting that next year – your 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary year – will bring a new era for the Victorian Artists' Society, housed in your freshly restored building, after four painstaking years of work.

Congratulations. Thank you for all you do for the rich cultural life of our State, and thank you for joining us this morning.