



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

THE VICTORIAN ARTISTS SOCIETY 150TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Tuesday 10th March 2020

Mrs Eileen Mackley AM, President of the Victorian Artists Society, and **Council Members**

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

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 evening.

When we hosted you at Government House just over a year ago now, I recall saying that the Victorian Artists Society has been one of the great contributors to Victoria's creativity.

I also noted then that this year would see you celebrating your 150th anniversary year.

And happily, here we are, to celebrate with you.

First, what a pleasure to be here – in your 'home' this time. Congratulations on the restorative work that you have achieved.

It is obvious that you have managed to keep the original building intact, respecting and safeguarding its heritage, while enhancing its contemporary functionality.

Living in a magnificent heritage building, we have a heightened appreciation of just how challenging it is to preserve an old building, staying true to its origins while, at the same time, ensuring it still meets the demands of the day!

Standing here, we have the additional pleasure of knowing that it was my predecessor, Victoria's 8th Governor, the Right Honourable the Earl of Hopetoun GCMG, who originally opened this building.

What a special link that history gives us. And how fitting that your refurbished historic building will bring in a new era for the Victorian Artists Society as it celebrates this, its 150th anniversary year.

It is an extraordinary feat for any organisation to survive across such a long time. One and a half centuries, encompassing buoyant economic times and depression, wartime and peace, governments of different colours and a variety of historical events, artists, fashions and interests. So many different office-holders and personalities.

For us, that time-frame is put in perspective when we consider that, when the VAS started, the land on the Domain Hill was still vacant. It was still two years before our Government House was even started – six years before Governor Bowen, CGMG – our State's 5th Governor – and his family could take up residence there.

Importantly, despite the passage of time, the VAS has not just survived. It has been vibrant, and remained dedicated to the one cause: to nurture and nourish our State's creative talent.

As those in this room well know, from early in its existence, the VAS was home to many of Victoria's most eminent artists – Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin and Walter Withers - to name just a few.

Indeed, almost every notable Australian painter from the late 19th to early 20th centuries was associated with the VAS. Fortunately for the people of Victoria, and thanks to the National Gallery of Victoria, many of their works grace the walls at Government House.

Today, the VAS continues to foster our artists. I understand you have another Exhibition opening a little later this evening.

So, with a history that has left a foot-print in three different centuries – as it were – the VAS has played and continues to play an important role in providing an opportunity for artists to develop and exhibit their work.

You also offer a rich menu of activities, including art classes, workshops, plein air painting, life and portrait groups and gallery hire.

It is a pleasure that this evening we recognise some of your members who have exhibited often, and others for their outstanding achievement, with the Signatory Awards and Fellowship Awards respectively.

Congratulations to each one of them.

And thank you to all those involved with the Victorian Artists Society.

We acknowledge your President, Eileen Mackley AM for her leadership and vision, council members and former Presidents and council members.

We thank the many Members, Friends, Trusts and Foundations for their generous support. Without your contributions, the Society could not have achieved all that it has over 150 years.

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

Of course, thank you to the artists. For the emotional response and the discussion that you provoke in us – through the beauty, the concepts and the ideas that you set before us.

Which leaves me only to say, on behalf of us both, as your joint Patrons in Chief '*Congratulations and Happy 150th Birthday*'.