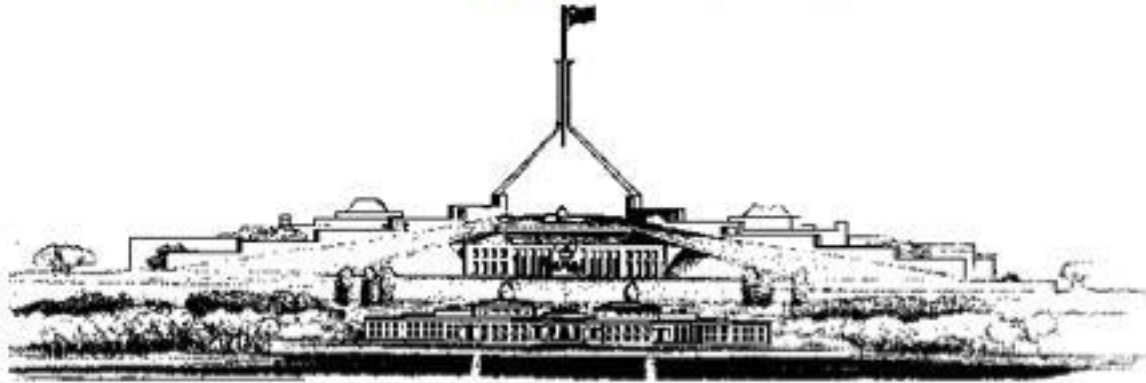




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**PROOF**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Australian National Veteran Arts Museum**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 8 May 2018**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 8 May 2018  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Kitching, Sen Kimberley

**Source** Senate  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

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**Senator KITCHING** (Victoria) (20:36): I want to take this brief opportunity to draw the Senate's attention to a great institution in my home town of Melbourne—an institution which far too few people know about. I'm talking about the Australian National Veteran Arts Museum. I had the opportunity on 24 April to visit the Veteran Arts Museum's most recent exhibition, called *March to Art: community through a veteran's eyes*, which was presented in the Collins Place Gallery in the heart of Melbourne. I was welcomed by Tanja Johnston, the head of the museum's arts program, who has done so much to bring this exhibition to fruition. I also had the pleasure to meet Sean Burton, the museum's artist-in-residence.

I was impressed by the power and depth of the artworks on display. All of it was the work of veterans, and all of it was expressing their emotions and experiences arising from their deployment in the service of Australia. Several of these artists, such as Geoffrey Jones and Michael Williams, are veterans of the Afghanistan conflict. I have just been to Afghanistan on the ADF Parliamentary Program and seen something of the ADF's ongoing commitment to the future of that country. The artworks I saw gave me an extra insight into the experiences of our personnel in Afghanistan.

The Veteran Arts Museum was established in 2013 and incorporated in April 2015. Its patron is retired Lieutenant General Ash Power, AO, CSC, a distinguished Australian Army veteran who was, at one time, Deputy Chief of Staff of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. The chairman and director of the museum is Mark Johnston, and the curator of the exhibition was Bruce Copland.

The museum was set up in response to the need for community based arts programs to support the wellbeing of former service members. It enables veterans to use the arts as a means of improving or maintaining their health and wellbeing. The museum works closely with veterans organisations and charities in delivering arts engagement and art therapy for veterans and their families.

During my visit I was briefed about the museum's efforts to secure, from the federal government, the heritage listed but sadly neglected and unused Defence property at 310 St Kilda Road, the former Repatriation Commission Outpatient Clinic. This property is in the heart of Melbourne's arts precinct, opposite the Shrine of Remembrance. It's a very fitting location for such a museum and such an endeavour. I fully support the museum's efforts to secure this property as its permanent base. That was a policy which the Leader of the Opposition took to the last election. We heard at Senate estimates in February that negotiations about the future of this property were ongoing, and I will raise this matter again at estimates later this month.

I also took the opportunity to write to the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Hon. Darren Chester, in relation to some additional funding for the Australian National Veterans Arts Museum so that the Melbourne exhibition can be exhibited in Canberra, hopefully towards the end of this year. I'm very hopeful that the minister will be able to support such an endeavour.

I want to read just a few of the comments on and responses to the exhibition from those who have attended. On 25 March this year one attendee said:

Absolutely incredible exhibition that is so full of self-expression, passion and emotion. Such an honour to meet some of the beautifully talented artists that created this exhibition. Very much looking forward to seeing more exhibitions.

Another said:

Amazing! Thank you ANVAM! Such important work, so healing.

Another attendee in March this year specifically mentioned the work of one of the artists, saying it:

... would not look out of place in Hosier Lane being Instagrammed around the globe! Great work everyone both on & off the field. Love your work. Very honest and evocative. Thanks, and I hope to see more exhibitions.

Other visitors commented:

Very sad but very powerful stories that have to be told—

Incredible heartfelt stories & works depicting the emotion of all life throws at you.

Great to see the power of art in the lives of veterans—and, as a viewer, to enter their lives too.

I would commend this exhibition, especially if it does come to Canberra. It would be in the vicinity of parliament, so it would be a good thing, I think, for all parliamentarians to see.