

Rupert Myer
National Australian Indigenous Triennial Launch
2007

Thank you Ron and Chris Lynch, Brenda Croft and all your gallery colleagues and artists at this meeting for this very special occasion. Members of the media, thank you for joining us this morning—we appreciate the interest that you show with this very important announcement—and to visitors to the gallery. It's rather nice for people who are just up in these galleries that they should also form part of this very special announcement.

I'm very pleased to add to the director's welcome to the National Gallery of Australia and his announcement today of a significant new arts partnership, and a major new contemporary visual arts event. The National Gallery of Australia is delighted to be announcing today its partnership with BHP Billiton to present the inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial, *Culture Warriors*, which will open on the 12th of October 2007, coinciding with the gallery's 25th anniversary celebrations. And at the outset, I would like to acknowledge and warmly thank BHP Billiton for their enthusiastic and generous support for this initiative. The discussions that have been held with BHP Billiton over the recent weeks and months have been marked by a genuine desire to see this initiative come into being.

It's been a real pleasure to work together towards today's announcement, and also to work together for the future success of this brand new undertaking. Their support for this national cultural institution, our National Gallery of Australia, is a warm acknowledgement of the role corporations can so beneficially play in the community. In the case of this triennial, BHP Billiton's leadership will contribute significantly to the triennial scholarship, broad public access, education programs, publications, as well as its marketing and promotion. As Ron just announced, the triennial will be seen here first in Canberra, starting in October, and it will also be seen in the Queensland Art Gallery in

Brisbane, the Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide, and the Art Gallery of Western Australia in Perth.

The gallery looks forward to working closely with BHP over the coming months and years. The National Indigenous Art Triennial is planned to become a permanent new contemporary art event in the Australian and international art calendar. It is intended to sit right alongside, and complement, existing annual, biennial, and triennial contemporary visual arts events in Australia which, of course, include the Sydney Biennale, Brisbane's Asia-Pacific Triennial, the Melbourne Art Fair, the Adelaide Biennial, and Darwin's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award. To ensure that each triennial is dynamic and stimulating, a different guest curator will curate the triennial every three years, with the inaugural triennial, *Culture Warriors*, to be curated by Brenda L Croft, Senior Curator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, here at the National Gallery of Australia.

For the National Gallery of Australia, the announcement of this partnership and triennial comes at a time when we have recently been pleased to announce several other important sponsorships. And of course, we're presently working on the commencement of our building program. During the course of our 25th anniversary celebrations, we're looking forward to any further announcements covering acquisitions, benefactions, exhibitions, and public programs. The inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial, *Culture Warriors*, will bring together 30 of the country's most innovative Indigenous contemporary artists in a thematic context, presenting a mini survey of their work. At each triennial, the works will be selected by the curator, by invitation, and will have been created in the three years leading up to the triennial.

Of particular significance, the works selected each triennial will represent the diversity of regions throughout Australia, with every state and territory being included. They will demonstrate a wide range of Indigenous art practice, and encompass media, including painting on canvas and bark, sculpture, textiles, weaving, new media, photo media, printmaking, and installation work. The establishment of this event will enable a far more

comprehensive and continuous curated overview of current indigenous art practice every three years. The National Indigenous Art Triennial will also enable the skills development of Indigenous curators, as each triennial will have a different curatorial approach by Indigenous professionals working in the industry.

There is a significant historical context to today's announcement as well. The inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial coincides with the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum, whereby non-Indigenous Australians voted overwhelmingly to include Indigenous Australians on the census to be considered as citizens. It also coincides with the establishment 50 years ago of the National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee.

In case it's not already obvious, the National Gallery of Australia, its management, staff and council could not be more delighted about today's announcement. Here we have with BHP Billiton, an example of inspired corporate leadership, coupled with a new permanent event, whose time has truly come. We can keenly anticipate the inaugural triennial which, we can be confident, will have a sharp curatorial edge and the accompanying publication that will be an enduring reminder of the scholarship that has underpinned the selection of both the artists and the art works.

We are also excited that at the four venues where the triennial will be presented audiences will doubtless enthusiastically engage with the works. We can't wait for it all to happen. I would now like to ask Brenda to introduce the artists, and outline the vision for *Culture Warriors*, the inaugural National Indigenous Art Triennial.