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**From weekly personal newsletter by John McDonald, art critic for *The Sydney Morning Herald*.**

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No sooner did I write this newsletter than surprising things started happening with the Powerhouse Museum saga, so I'm hastily revising. I'd been informed we were on the verge of some very bad news, which probably entailed the break-up of the museum and selling off of the land in Ultimo – a consummate act of cultural vandalism.

All of a sudden, Liberal MP, Matthew Mason-Cox crossed the floor to help force his own party to release the "business case" for the Powerhouse relocation. Mr Mason-Cox was apparently just as disgusted as the Friends of the Powerhouse, by the government's brazen statement that they wouldn't be releasing the business plan until three months after the decision had been announced.

The MP has also been an opponent of the idiotical idea of spending more than \$2 billion demolishing and rebuilding two sporting grounds, and a critic of the culture of secrecy and intrigue that has grown up within the Berejiklian government. In other words, he is that rare politician who values conscience and common sense over party politics and vested interests. He'll probably be punished for his temerity, but he deserves the full-on support of his electorate for this stand. Even if he has to run as an independent.

The next amazing development is that Luke Aquinas Foley, the Opposition Leader, grew an instant backbone – or is it a set of functioning eyes & ears? – and announced that the Labor Party would oppose the move of the Powerhouse. This is a bit of a laugh, considering they've had years to assess the ludicrous nature of the scheme and state their opposition, but better late than never. When the government seemed to hesitate over the move about a year ago, Mr. Foley actually complained that the arts-loving citizens of Parramatta were about to be short-changed! It seems it took Mr. Mason-Cox's courageous stand to convince the Labor Party that their opportunism was misplaced. Their backflip is the first sensible initiative we've had from the Opposition re the arts. By now it may be too much to expect the government to give up its strong-arm tactics, its profligate waste of tax-payers' money, its cosy, secretive deals with developers and favoured companies, but surely they can see that electoral disaster looms.

All this comes in the same week that the Australian Centre for the Moving Image in Melbourne announced that the Victorian state government is chipping in \$36.6 million for "a visionary transformation".

"Visionary" is a daunting word, so let's allow for a degree of hype. Nevertheless this is yet another instance of Victoria making a constructive contribution to its arts institutions while NSW wallows in secrecy and confusion. A fraction of the money the NSW government is preparing to squander on rebuilding stadia would have done wonders for the cash-strapped Sydney Biennale. It would help to support and revive the regional gallery network. Andrew Andersons and others

have raised some serious criticisms of the Art Gallery of NSW's Sydney Modern project and put forward cheaper, more effective alternatives but there is no suggestion that the Government is listening.

If this state is dropping further and further behind Victoria in arts matters it's largely down to policies and leadership. Sydney is the first destination for most tourists but its natural advantages are being undermined by its cultural imbecility. The days of rampant overdevelopment are back at the expense of the public good, as the Berejiklian government comes more and more to resemble Nero's administration. At least they haven't begun making human torches out of their critics. Yet.

This week's column looks at the soon-to-be-reborn Australian Centre for the Moving Image, which is hosting *Wonderland* – a show about Lewis Carroll's famous creation and the various ways her adventures have been captured on film. This is a great idea and one can almost feel the enthusiasm that has gone into the display. *Wonderland* is an example of an original show with massive public appeal that can be put together in Australia without exorbitant costs. There's a willing audience out there if only museums and galleries start using some imagination. <http://johnmcdonald.net.au/2018/wonderland/>

There's no shortage of originality this this week's movie – Wes Anderson's *Isle of Dogs*. This is Anderson's second stop-motion animation, and one of the most bizarre and entrancing features you'll see this year. I know there are people who can't stand Anderson's eccentricities, but he's one of the few contemporary directors that keeps delivering surprises rather than relying on tried-and-true formulae. No less of a showman than Georges Méliès, he's a filmmaker that encourages us to keep faith with the cinema...

John