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From
John
McDonald 

It's the NSW State elections this weekend and the arts lobby has finally been baring its teeth, although in political terms you should think hamster rather than tiger.

We're always hearing what great communicators the arts people are, but for the most part the conversations occur within small cliques, not in the public arena.

For me, and a lot of other people, the election has become a kind of referendum on the Powerhouse Museum. The proposal to 'move' the Powerhouse to Parramatta is nothing more than a sneaky real estate deal. It doesn't make sense in any other interpretation. It will be ridiculously expensive. It's not going to give Parramatta a new arts facility. It will have a devastating impact on attendance figures. It's impossible to 'move' the collection to a smaller site without destroying its very *raison d'être*. In brief: it's a brazen exercise in transferring public assets into private hands at the expense of the state's cultural heritage.

If the Berejiklian government is re-elected it has vowed to pursue this ill-conceived plan. If Labor gets in, the Powerhouse is saved. This is an excellent reason to vote Labor.

Are there any other good reasons? The Opposition Leader, Michael Daley has also promised to double the funding allocation for regional arts – which is another area of chronic neglect. On the government side, Arts Minister, Don Harwin has emerged as a fierce champion of the National Arts School – which is indubitably a good thing. If only Don could find it in his heart to lavish the same affection on the Powerhouse and the regions...

The Government is making a big song & dance about its economic record, but in NSW the cash will keep flowing no matter who's in power. The coffers are

full because of the sale of public assets, the “poles and wires”. It’s the way the bounty has been spent - on expensive infrastructure projects that never seem to end, go miles over budget, and never reveal a viable business plan - that raises problems. The sheer arrogance of so many ministers is breathtaking. There is no transparency, no accountability, and a born-to-rule attitude that shows contempt for the electorate. They’re prepared to flash the cash and tell us they care right up until voting day, but given another term they will recommence their evil deeds with redoubled energy.

As for Labor, can we have much confidence? Mr. Daley has goofed big time in a speech talking about Asians taking Australian jobs. He lost his way in a public debate with Gladys. He’s still trying to live down his associations with the gangsters who ran the ALP into the ground when they were previously in government.

What can we hope for in this state in which politics has been a byword for incompetence and corruption since the days of the Rum Rebellion? We need to stop the current mob before they sell off every asset to their corporate mates. We may expect it will take Labor at least two years to become as greedy, arrogant and sneaky as the current incumbents. So let’s vote Labor this weekend and buy ourselves a little time. As you see, I’m not a party animal.

This week’s art column looks at *After Nature*, Janet Laurence’s survey at the Museum of Contemporary Art. I’ve tried hard to like this show but it hasn’t grown on me no matter how long I look. Although I’d cheer on all Janet’s views about the environment, conservation and climate change, I can’t accept that good politics automatically guarantees memorable works of art.

The movie being reviewed is *Destroyer*, in which Nicole Kidman is virtually destroyed by the make-up artists. Karyn Kusama shows that a female director can make a really tough ‘bad cop’ film as well as any of her male counterparts. It’s a gruelling affair, but a big step up from some of the violent trash that passes for cop films nowadays. Nevertheless, I’d still prefer Inspector Maigret or Philip Marlowe over Nicole’s new persona. I’m pretty confident there won’t be a sequel. I only wish I could say the same for the NSW government.

For many people in the Sydney art world, the big news of the week is the death of Edmund Capon, former director of the Art Gallery of NSW. I've done an obituary for a forthcoming issue of the Art Newspaper, but I'm running it this week, while everyone is still talking (fondly!) about Edmund.

John

Sydney Morning Herald Art Column



[Janet Laurence: After Nature](#)

[“What need has nature of thought, of care?” asked Confucius in the 5thC. BCE.](#)

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Film



Destroyer

[If you thought the make-up department had done a number on Margot Robbie in Mary Queen of Scots, wait until you see Nicole Kidman in Destroyer.](#)

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