

THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF TASMANIA
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, TUESDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 2022

[VICE-REGAL SALUTE IS PLAYED]

Please be seated.

Good evening. I warmly welcome you all to Government House to this gala fundraising evening for the Royal Society of Tasmania Art Collection.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their enduring culture. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I commit to a future that listens to and respects Aboriginal stories, culture and history.

I welcome all our many guests, but may I acknowledge among us former Governor Kate Warner and Dick Warner; former Governor William Cox and Jocelyn Cox; and Frances Underwood. May I also acknowledge Jocelyn McPhie, RST President and her colleagues, who have done so much work in preparing for this function and to elevate it to a truly high standard.

May I also mention our Executive Chef Ainstie Wagner and her Kitchen team, who as you will see have matched the supper menu to the seven featured artists using indigenous and Government House produce.

Speaking of Government House and these artists, there are two in particular I would like to mention.

Simpkinson de Wesselow came to Van Diemen's Land in 1840 as a naval officer, to take up work at the Rossbank Magnetic Observatory, which was established by Lieutenant Governor Sir John Franklin. De Wesselow's mother was Mary Griffin, who was the sister of Lady Jane Franklin. Very Tasmanian!

Many of you will know that Rossbank is an intricate part of our Government House story. Probably in 1845, de Wesselow painted a work, entitled "Rossbank Observatory". It is a work of historical importance. It is a spectacular view of the adjacent open-cut quarry, which later supplied most of

the sandstone for this building. As many of you will know, it has become today's beautifully landscaped Quarry Pond.

Incidentally, at this year's Open Day in November, a levelled area on the far side, with seating overlooking the Quarry Pond, will be formally named as the Platinum Jubilee Lookout.

The other artist featured this evening, of Government House significance, is Louisa Anne Meredith. One of her original artworks is hanging in the Royal Suite upstairs.

In the 1860s, Louisa wrote a suite of poems for the twelve days of Christmas called a "Masque". Music was composed as well, with matching groups of posed figures in various Government House State Rooms: the same rooms in which this evening's works are displayed. The Masque portraits are wonderful examples of early Van Diemen's Land photography.

Also, just last month, we received a gift from a Victorian resident Diana Frew, née Young. She is the great-great grand-daughter of Lady Augusta Young, wife of the first Governor to occupy this building in 1858, through to 1861, the end of his term.

Lady Augusta Young paid a return visit to Tasmania in 1888 and, to welcome her, leading citizens signed what was called an Illuminated Address. It is a large velvet-and-stud covered book of eight boards, each one with signatures. The signatures are surrounded by exquisite original botanical artworks painted by Louisa Anne Meredith. There is also equally fine calligraphy in the letter addressed to Lady Young. It is probably Louisa's work as well.

The fact that this unique book of original art has had no hint of existence until now – over 130 years later – suggests a wonderful serendipity between its recent arrival here and Louisa's works available this evening. We have the book on display in the Drawing Room for us all to view.

Also, regarding Louisa, the dessert this evening to be served in the Ball Room later is called "Frog in a Pond" and is a homage to Louisa's painting "A Cool Debate", of frogs in a pond. The image is one requiring significant funding to restore. It is, in any event, a very valuable work on its own right, and so the dessert will be a tasty reminder of why we're here this evening!

May I mention another Government House and Royal Society art connection, Sir Francis Newdegate, who was Governor of Tasmania from 1917 to 1920.

An unusual cultural connection with him is that the author George Eliot (1819-1880) was born at Arbury Hall, the Newdigate/Newdegate family estate in Warwickshire. She was allowed to use its private library for study, and various Newdegate family members made their way into her fiction.

And, equally unusually, certainly in the Tasmanian cultural context, Governor Newdegate did what no other Governor surely has: he brought with him from Arbury Hall a huge collection of his artworks, which he loaned for what must have been a unique exhibition at the Tasmanian Art Gallery.

They consisted of 50 water-colours, including four of the works of Turner, and 57 drawings and sketches by famous masters, including Raphael; Veronese; Tintoretto; Poussin; Van Dyck; Rubens; and Holbein. The selection and removal of works were carried out by Mr L. Dechaineux and Mr Clive Lord, secretary of the Royal Society and Art Gallery.ⁱ

What a wonderful position to have been in to make such a selection of art works from our Government House and to take on loan for an exhibition!

So, history tells us that Government House has had a keen connection with artists and their paintings.

On that note, may I conclude by inviting all of us to think about what art works should be on display here at our Government House, and how the current works may be updated.

Thank you. David, ...

ⁱ Mercury, Wednesday 13 March 1918, page 3.