

OPENING THE OPTOMEYES 2013 ART EXHIBITION
BY
THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC GOVERNOR OF
TASMANIA

HOBART - THURSDAY 31st OCTOBER 2013

I have been asked to open this exhibition, not because I know a lot about the visual arts, but because I am the Patron of the Hobart City Mission. I have to say that I am proud to be the Mission's Patron; a non-denominational Christian organisation that has been operating in the Hobart area since 1852. This year is the Hobart City Mission's 161st year of supporting the Tasmanian community, making it the third oldest mission in the world and the oldest in Australia. "The Mission is a non-denominational Christian organisation providing support to anyone in need. It helps people in times of crisis or in those moments when extra support is needed just to do life. The Mission takes a holistic approach to its work by providing physical, financial, social, emotional and spiritual support and guidance. Its services and programs aim to empower people and enable them to participate in community life with a sense of dignity, purpose and self-reliance."¹

Although my knowledge and understanding of modern art is not my qualification for opening this exhibition, I have tried to become a little more knowledgeable about the visual arts but I do find some of it rather baffling. I have even grappled with International Art Speak and in the course of doing so read about an exhibition in the Simon Lee Gallery in Mayfair, London that was showing work by the veteran American artist, Sherrie Levine. Amongst the works was a piece that comprised a dozen small pink skulls in glass cases that faced the door.

¹ <http://hobartcitymission.org.au/> accessed 22nd October 2013 & slightly edited.

There was also a dozen small bronze mirrors, blandly framed but precisely arranged, winking from the walls.

The exhibition hand-out read: "The artist brings the viewer face to face with their own preconceived hierarchy of cultural values and assumptions of artistic worth." It says, "Each mirror imaginatively propels its viewer forward into the seemingly infinite progression of possible reproductions that the artist's practice engenders, whilst simultaneously pulling them backwards in a quest for the 'original' source or referent that underlines Levine's oeuvre."²

I am sure that you will have found that explanation as helpful as I did.

It is often said that the sooner children are exposed to the visual arts the greater will be their appreciation of it as they grow up. So, in an attempt to see if I could infuse in one of my grandchildren a better appreciation of modern art than I have, I took one of them to see some modern art at a Gallery in Melbourne. It was the day after the opening and the artist was at the gallery. We wandered around these huge canvasses splashed and daubed with oils of brilliant and clashing hues. We were standing in front of one piece that was a murky gray color with drips of purple paint streaked across it when my grandson asked me in tones loud enough for the artist to hear, "What is it Granddad? I can't understand it" and the artist, who shall remain nameless, sidled up to us and rather superciliously, I thought, said "I paint what I feel inside me". As he turned away, my grandson said in a stage whisper, "Why don't you give him one of your Quickeze, Granddad?"

² <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/jan/27/users-guide-international-art-english>
accessed 22nd October 2013

So, please feel free to ask me, or my grandson, if you need some artistic elaboration or interpretation, but I expect that you are all ready to get stuck into the auction and to bid to pick up a Tom Samek or two – I’ve got two Tom Samek’s at home – I mean our own home, not the big house – or perhaps one from that wonderful water colour artist, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (London) who is 99 years old and still going strong, Max Angus. He outdid me at the centenary of the State Cinema celebrations a couple of weeks back where he spoke for about 10 minutes without any notes at all. If you are not successful in getting any of their work, you should redouble your efforts and secure one by the well-known and leading Tasmanian water colourist, Richard Bacon or perhaps a painting by last year’s winner of the People’s Choice Award, Rachael Ireland-Myers.

There is a great deal of talent out there in the 15th Hobart City Mission Optomeyes Art Exhibition, with 275 pieces of artwork by over 100 artists. And I would urge you all to buy a work because, if you do, you will not only be doing yourself a favour, but you will also be doing a favour for someone who is in need of the assistance and support given by the Hobart City Mission.

If you don’t buy a painting I issue a vice-regal order that is compulsory to buy a \$20 book before you leave the building. Artist Sonia Strong is also an author and she has written and illustrated a book for children which she has called - not surprisingly for those who have seen her work - “Tazzie the Turbo Chook finds her feet.” I bought one when I was looking at the exhibition this afternoon and have already given it a test run on one of own grandchildren and it was as great

success. Copies are here on the table. \$10 from every sale is Sonia's gift to the Hobart City Mission.

Now as I declare the art exhibition open, I would like to thank *all* the sponsors of this annual fund raiser for the Hobart City Mission - their names are listed in the catalogue - especially Optomeyes, whose optometric skills have enabled me to read this address quite clearly - at first they suggested that I bypass a new pair of glasses and go straight for the white stick which was on special that week, but I declined their offer.

Thank you all for coming along and supporting this great cause and good luck at the auction.