

**ART FROM INSIDE EXHIBITION
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
WATERSIDE PAVILION, MAWSON PLACE, TUESDAY 25 AUGUST 2020**

Thank you, Karin McCormack for inviting me to open this exhibition.

I too wish to pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land— the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who have survived invasion and dispossession, and who continue to maintain their identity, culture and their Indigenous rights.

The COVID-19 pandemic brings home to us today the destructive force of respiratory illnesses on populations without immunity. The reason we have no living descendants of the mouhineener – the people who occupied the land on this side of the river, and why they perished so soon after colonisation – is largely due to the devastating effect of respiratory disease.

And speaking of COVID-19, I should acknowledge that imprisonment is an area like aged care which is severely affected by pandemic lockdowns. These institutions have a number of things in common – close communication with staff and residents that puts them at greater risk; a greater proportion of vulnerable residents than in the general population; and restrictions on visitors and cuts to programmes. We do hear a lot about the effects of the pandemic on aged care residents but comparatively little about its effects on prisoners and prison staff. The pandemic has drastically cut contacts with the outside world, not only incoming visitors and families, but also opportunities to participate in outside work. It has been many months since we have had prisoners working at Government House and I am aware that therapeutic programmes have been cancelled or delayed.

That is one reason that I am pleased to be opening this exhibition – it is an opportunity to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on prisoners. The second is that, as a criminologist, I have long had an interest in prisons. I think I can say, without being too provocative, that it is concerning that the imprisonment rate has been increasing for some years and this is not because the crime rate is increasing. According to the latest reported census, Australia has an imprisonment rate of 219 per 100,000 – in Tasmania it is 165 per 100,000, the third lowest behind the ACT and Victoria.¹ In comparison, Holland has a rate of 50 per 100,000 and a decreasing rate that has allowed some 19 prisons to be closed.

¹ <https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/statistics/sentencing-trends/australia-imprisonment-rates>

The Productivity Commission tells us that, on the basis of past recidivism data, 47% of prisoners released in Tasmania will be back in prison within two years.² If we are to keep imprisoning people at the rate we do, we have an obligation to do better at rehabilitation and re-integration.

Rule 4, 1 of the *United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners* as revised and adopted by the General Assembly in December 2015, provides:

The purposes of a sentence of imprisonment or similar measures deprivative of a person's liberty are primarily to protect society against crime and to reduce recidivism. Those purposes can be achieved only if the period of imprisonment is used to ensure, so far as possible, the reintegration of such persons into society upon release so that they can lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life.

This requires opportunities for education, vocational training, meaningful work and activities in an environment which is as therapeutic as possible in a prison.

The potential of Art in Corrections has been demonstrated. It can be:

- Cathartic, sublimating violence and aggression;
- Promote non-verbal communication, and the expression of things that a prisoner may not want or be able to express verbally;
- It can be a diversion – an emotional escape;
- Provide an opportunity to explore unknown strengths and talents;
- Help a person to identify other than as in inmate.

I looked with interest at Karin's catalogue and observed the way in which the theme of peace has inspired the exhibited art works and the artists to explore what peace means for them – whether that be feeling thankful for living in a country at peace; taking pleasure in making a sketch or learning to use charcoal; remembering someone lost; portraying grief; the satisfaction of making others laugh (I too laughed at refusing to sleep as resisting arrest); evoking the strength and resilience of the Ghost Gum; swirling colour to portray feelings of serenity and tranquillity; pride in a task well-accomplished; a drawn and painted gift; quilting the missing imagined sea; finding and expressing a vision and carrying on a legacy.

I am looking forward to inspecting these works and I congratulate all of the exhibiting artists as well as the prize winners. And I would also like to thank all who have supported this exhibition, Curator Karin McCormack; judges, tutors and the planning team, and the Prison Fellowship.

I now declare open the 2020 Art from Inside Exhibition: Peace.

² <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-22/half-tasmanian-prisoners-likely-to-be-back-in-jail-in-2-years/12059210>