

# Eminent Australians call on ABC to Support Arts

<http://www.fabc.org.au/fabc/>

Sunday, 04 September 2011

**4 September 2011 Tim Winton, Nick Cave, Betty Churcher, Geoffrey Rush and Elizabeth Ann Macgregor** are among a group of local artists who are dismayed and outraged at ABC management's decision to chop *Art Nation*, the ABC's sole TV arts magazine program, and disband the national broadcaster's TV arts unit. Their names are included in a veritable 'who's who' of people prominent in the arts and other parts of life who have issued an open letter to the ABC Board to complain at what is happening. The letter has the support of **SA Premier Mike Rann** and **Melbourne Lord Mayor Robert Doyle**. Signatories like leading scientist **Sir Gustav Nossal**, football legend **Ron Barassi** and economist **Saul Eslake** reflect the breadth of interest in this issue. "We fear the arts are being marginalised by the ABC's concentration on prime-time programming," said Jonathan Biggins, a leading Australian theatre director and writer. The reasons cited for the planned cuts to arts by the head of ABC TV in a memo to ABC staff and reported in the media, are: "falling audiences" and an interest to "focus its

limited financial resources on prime-time programming". In other words, ratings. □□ "What separates the ABC from commercial networks is the rigour and imagination to seek out the poets, the myth-makers and painters. If the cultural life of this country is not considered worthy of the national broadcaster's continuous attention, then what is?" said Biggins. □□ "This act of cultural vandalism will also seriously diminish the ABC's role as the nation's cultural archivist," said Michael Shrimpton, a former head of ABC TV Arts and Entertainment. "The ABC is a chronicler of our greatest artistic achievements." □□ The ABC Charter gives the public broadcaster a responsibility to produce "programs of cultural enrichment" and "encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia". □□ "The Board will have failed if it does not ensure a strong and viable television arts unit which can both commission and create great programs," said Biggins and Shrimpton.

**OPEN LETTER TO THE ABC BOARD 3.9.2011**

Maurice Newman AC – Chairman, and members of the ABC Board

Dear Mr Newman

**Request to Stop the Destruction of ABC TV Arts**

For the past fifty years, ABC TV has introduced Australians to an array of extraordinary local artists – from Sir Robert Helpmann to Kate Grenville, from the emerging Western Desert artists to Nick Cave.

The ABC TV arts unit has taken us into our galleries, theatres and museums, sharing the country's evolving cultural life. In the last year alone, the unit produced over 500 stories. It has

championed new artists, engaged practitioners, and built a vast record of the work of those who strive to articulate our place in the world. Where else do we turn to celebrate our great artists? When we mourned Dame Joan Sutherland, and Margaret Olley, the ABC helped us pay tribute to their lives and work.

We are deeply disturbed by ABC management's plan to axe ABC TV's only arts magazine program, disband the TV arts unit and divert resources to prime time, populist content in pursuit of ratings. It will diminish the ABC's irreplaceable role as the nation's cultural memory. And sadly, it will reflect no glory whatsoever on what was once considered the single greatest achievement of Australia's intellectual and artistic life: the ABC itself.

Without a strong in-house unit to create and to commission arts programming, the national broadcaster will fail its charter responsibilities. And it will fail us, by not reminding us that our national character is informed and shaped by the imagination and creativity of artists.

Yours sincerely

Bruce Armstrong – sculptor, painter

Stephen Armstrong – producer

Ron Barassi AM – Australian Football Legend in the Sport Australia Hall of Fame

Jonathan Biggins – theatre director and writer

Gay Bilson – writer, chef

Nancy Black – theatre director

Polly Borland – artist

Julian Burnside AO QC – barrister

Peter Carey – novelist

Nick Cave – musician, writer

Betty Churcher AO – former Director of the National Gallery of Australia

J M Coetzee – writer

Stefano de Pieri – celebrity chef

Robert Doyle – Lord Mayor of Melbourne

Adam Elliot – animation writer, director, producer

Tony Ellwood – Director, Queensland Art Gallery

Saul Eslake – economist; Director, Australian Business Arts Foundation and former Chair of the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board

Helen Garner – writer

Richard Gill OAM – Music Director, Victorian Opera

Paul Grabowsky – Artistic Director, Adelaide Festival of Arts

John Hillcoat – film director

Janet Holmes à Court AC, HFAIB – businesswoman and arts philanthropist

Chloe Hooper – writer

Lindy Hume – festival Director, Sydney Festival

Hon Dr Barry Jones AO, FAA, FAHA, FSTE, FASSA – former Minister and writer

Michael Kantor – theatre director and actor

Lally Katz – playwright

Tom Keneally - writer

Barrie Kosky – theatre and opera director

Nam Le – writer

Michael Leunig – artist

Elizabeth Ann Macgregor OBE – Director, Museum of Contemporary Art

Shane Maloney – novelist

David Malouf – writer

Dr Richard Mills AM – composer

Jonathan Mills AO – Composer & Director, Edinburgh International Festival

Harold Mitchell AC – Executive Director, Aegis Media

Vera Moeller and Phillip Hunter – visual artists

Simon Mordant – Chairman, Museum of Contemporary Art and arts philanthropist

Graeme Murphy AM – director and choreographer

Ralph Myers – Artistic Director, Belvoir

Robyn Nevin - actress

Sir Gustav Nossal AC, CBE, FRS, FAA – medical scientist

Hetti Perkins – Senior Curator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, Art Gallery of NSW

Hon Mike Rann MP – Premier of South Australia and Minister for the Arts

David Risstrom – President, Friends of the ABC (Vic)

Peter Robb – author

Geoffrey Rush – actor

Patricia Sabine – Design Director, Design Forum Tasmania

Anna Schwartz – gallery owner

Emeritus Prof Margaret Seares AO – Former Chair, Australia Council for the Arts and former Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor, The University of Western Australia

Stephen Sewell – writer

Michael Shrimpton – former head of ABC TV Arts and Entertainment

Anne Summers – author and journalist

John Wardle – Principal, John Wardle Architects

David Williamson – playwright and screenwriter

Tamara Winikoff – Executive Director, National Association for the Visual Arts

Tim Winton – writer

Philip Wolfhagen – visual artist

John Wolseley – artist