

Dear Senator Bernardi

I am writing to contextualise the process by which I was offered the commission to create a body of work to mark the 25th anniversary of Parliament House, which has been under investigation by Senate Estimates.

Whilst I understand the importance of the work of Senate Estimates in examining the operations of government, I feel that the singular focus of the questions on the process of procurement has resulted in undermining the value of the work; and damaged my reputation and integrity and that of Carol Mills, who at all times has been honourable, diligent and professional.

It is true that Secretary, Carol Mills is a neighbour. Carol spoke to me about the 25th Anniversary of Parliament House on one occasion during a neighbourhood gathering in late December in 2012 and suggested it might be interesting to have an art photographer respond to the buildings particularly in light of its forthcoming 25th Anniversary. She described some of the extraordinary spaces of the basement, upholstery store, the rock store, Parliament's art collection and the beautiful gardens, all of which resonated with me. I was aware that Parliament House has been documented by many well known Australian art photographers, including Max Dupain and David Moore, and it seemed to me to make sense to have a contemporary photographer add to this body of work today. I also knew of the many commissions that had been undertaken by my peers in the past during the early years of its construction.

I am very proud of the body of work I created for Parliament House. My *Parliament House at Work* is a significant contribution to the cultural heritage of the institution and builds on significant photographic holdings in the Collection. It received a very enthusiastic response from the thousands of visitors who saw its exhibition earlier this year from 5 June – 10 August 2014. Installation views below.

I mentioned the Parliamentary commission in an interview during the Ballarat International Biennale along with a host of other professional engagements after being asked the question, "And what next for Anne Zahalka?" I spoke of having been invited to do the commission (although it hadn't been officially been offered a contract) I feel mortified that this brief remark should have raised so many questions now for the Senate Estimate Enquiry.

In the recent Annual Report from Parliament House, one of the photographs graces the cover and images from the series illustrate each chapter of the publication <http://www.aph.gov.au/~media/05%20About%20Parliament/54%20Parliamentary%20Depts/543%20DPS/DPSAnnualReport2013-14.pdf>. A number of works are currently installed in Parliamentary Meeting Rooms as well as the Parliamentary Library. The amount paid of \$30,000 for 10 works required the equivalent of 6 months work and is very much less than the market value. I feel that the work has been considerably devalued and my integrity undermined - that this project is collateral damage caused to a Parliamentary commission that should, instead, be celebrating the outcome. This has been unfairly detrimental to the people it represents - the unrecognised workers who maintain the building - and to Ms Mills who has had the vision to propose such a project to mark the building's 25th

Anniversary. Senator Hogg and Madam Speaker, Bronwyn Bishop were both on the committee to approve the final selection of works and spoke at the Official Opening which was documented and published in the City News. <http://citynews.com.au/2014/photos-breathe-life-hallowed-halls-parliament-house/> as well as *Her Canberra* amongst others reviews <http://www.hercanberra.com.au/index.php/2014/06/19/parliament-house-at-work-exhibition-shows-the-people-behind-the-politicians/>. There was a forum following the Opening and Launch where academic and curator, Helen Ennis spoke, Dr Martyn Jolly from the National University in Canberra, as well as myself.

Below is the catalogue of the complete series of works produced to mark the 25th Anniversary of Parliament House, 10 works of which are now in the collection. It is hoped that this popular exhibition will travel to regional galleries in Australia with whom I have had a long association through prior exhibition. It will be a great shame if this enquiry damages the possibility of touring the exhibition and promoting this important set of photographs documenting the workers who maintain Parliament House.





**Installation views during its exhibition at Parliament House 5 June – 10 August 2014**

I trust that this information is of assistance, and that it will now be taken into account in the Committee's deliberations.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding the commission.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Zahalka

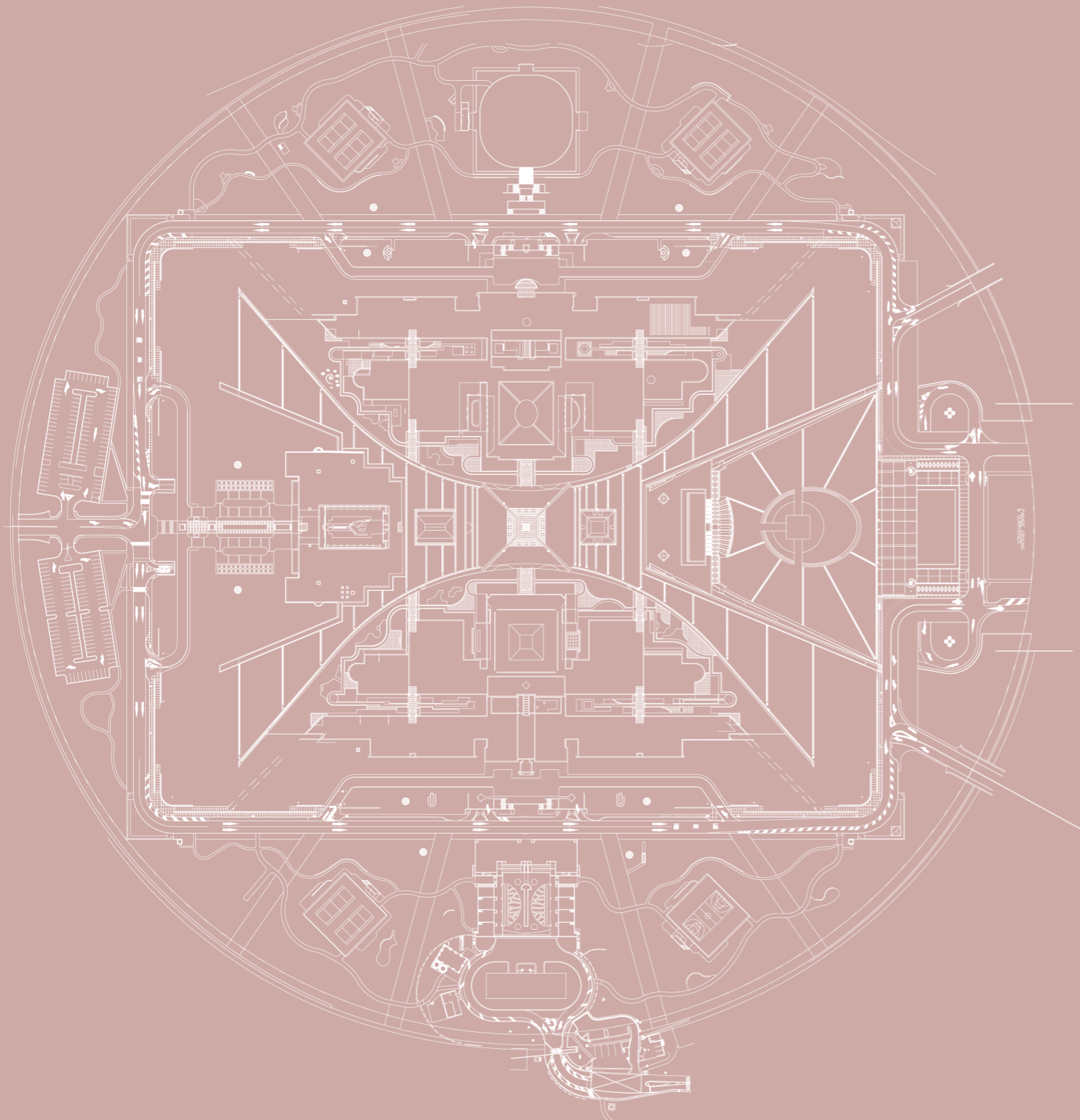
# PARLIAMENT HOUSE



**at work.**

**25th Anniversary commission**

**ANNE ZAHALKA**



# PARLIAMENT HOUSE

at work.

**PARLIAMENT HOUSE** is one of the most photographed and celebrated institutions in Australia. Yet rarely has it been portrayed through the people who work there. This series of photographs explores all levels of the building from the subterranean basement to the monumental marble foyer and reflects on the role staff play in securing, maintaining and breathing life into its hallowed halls.

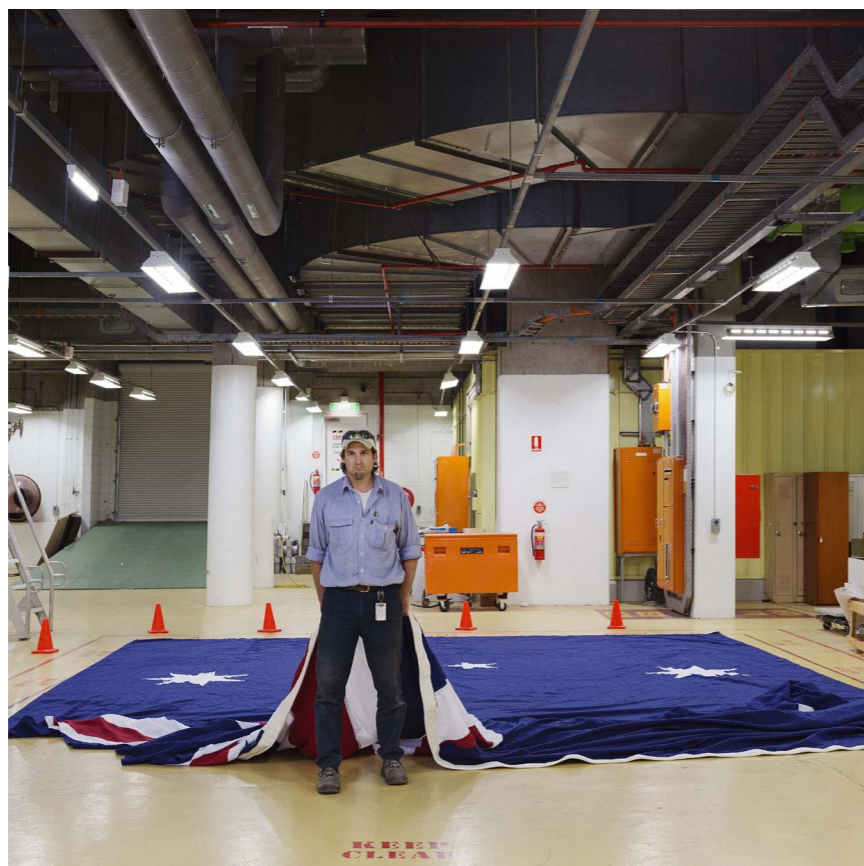
ANNE ZAHALKA



ISBN: 0980655447 and 978-0-9806554-4-5

Title: Parliament House at work. 25th Anniversary Commission Anne Zahalka  
Authors: Dr Martyn Jolly and Anne Zahalka  
Publisher: Department of Parliamentary Services  
Designer: Barbara Martusewicz

© 2014 Department of Parliamentary Services, the artists and authors  
All images are by Anne Zahalka from the series *Parliament at work*.



*Mechanical Fitter, Plant Room, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 80cm  
Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra

COVER  
*Gardener, Forecourt, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 80cm  
Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra

**In 2013, Parliament House celebrated its 25th anniversary with a program of activities and events that celebrated the history and heritage of the Parliament.** This commission and the resulting exhibition are a fitting conclusion to a year of special events as we celebrate through these images, the many people who support the work of the Parliament, and ensure that the building and the important activity that takes place within it, functions effectively.

One of the largest buildings in the southern hemisphere, when Parliament is in session more than 5,000 people work in the building at any given time and a wide range of services and facilities are required to support those workers as well as the more than one million people who visit every year.

In selecting an artist to undertake this commission it was important to ensure that it was someone who understood the scale of the building and the scope of the work that is performed within. Anne Zahalka is one of Australia's leading photographers and during a thirty year practice she has produced some of the most iconic images of contemporary Australia, often working in a large panoramic format. The grand scale of her works and the fastidious detail they contain made her the logical choice for this commission and we thank her for realising this commission so beautifully.

The parliamentary departments provide a wide range of diverse services and facilities to ensure that the Parliament functions effectively. Anne Zahalka's works capture a sample of the varied tasks undertaken each and every day, such as maintaining the building, its grounds and collections, and providing services to parliamentarians, workers and visitors.

This project would not have been possible without additional funding from the Federal Government, we thank them for their support. We also acknowledge the staff of the parliamentary departments and our contracted service providers for the work that they do in supporting Parliament and parliamentarians.



## ANNE ZAHALKA AT WORK

Everybody wants a behind the scenes tour.

Documentary filmmakers and photographers have always catered to this desire to lift the hood on an institution and see how the human machinery underneath works. We all remember seeing documentaries about, for example, the 'below stairs' bustle of majestic mansions, the below decks drills of mighty warships at sea, the behind the scenes dramas of great opera houses, or the backroom machinations of political campaigns. Our Parliament House combines all of these aspects — from the aristocratic to the bellicose to the operatic to the Machiavellian — in the one magnificent site that virtually every Australian has visited, or will visit, at one time or another. And even when we aren't there in person — trailing through the public level in school groups, queuing for a spot in the public galleries, or attending a function in the Great Hall — we still see one or another of the several tips of the Parliamentary iceberg every night on TV: a shouting match in the chamber, a doorstep interview on a chilly Canberra morning, or the forced chit-chat of caucus or cabinet before the doors are closed on the cameras.

But how does it all run? Or, more specifically, who runs it all? Last year, twenty-five years after it opened, Anne Zahalka was commissioned to photograph Parliament House and, through a process of discussion and experimentation, eventually decided to work with the staff, the ordinary but essential people who keep the vast machinery of the legislature running day in day out, from year to year and from government to government. Of course Parliament House is an extraordinary piece of architecture, not so much a building set in a landscape as a citadel which is part building and part hill, a self-contained city voyaging through time on its own temporal rhythms driven by the imperatives of parliamentary sittings and legislative agendas. And photographers have always loved it; its flat planes, hard edges and abutted textures are made for the camera. Nor was Zahalka the first photographer to be commissioned to photograph it. As it was

being built in the 1980s the Parliament House Construction Photography Project commissioned twenty-eight emerging and established photographers to respond to the construction process and the building as it grew into the hill. Most of the photographers concentrated on the tangled formal patterns which the concrete, reinforcing mesh, formwork, and so on made against the mud and bedrock. Only some, most notably Sandy Edwards, photographed the workers themselves — union members in her case — who were needed to actually do the work. As hill mutated into building other photographers, for instance Debra Phillips, got the opportunity to photograph the vast and complex cathedral like spaces that were opening themselves up beneath the buttresses and aprons of concrete above. These photographers can be seen as precedents to Zahalka's anniversary commission.

But that heroic construction phase was long ago, the building and its staff have long since settled into a regular rhythm, chugging efficiently along as political storms rage above, and it is that on which Zahalka has concentrated. However in her work we still get a sense of the building's full architectural scale, which so fascinated the construction phase photographers, through the building's employees. A worker checks her phone in a storeroom for old furniture which has been built, at the lowest level of the building, into the roughly excavated bedrock of the hill itself. In another photograph another worker tugs apart the bus-sized flag which is about to fly high above the swards of rooftop grass, from the top of the massive quadrapod flagpole.

The architecture of the building has also written itself into the very compositional structure of Zahalka's images. Like the building itself all of her images are strictly symmetrical and organised around a central axis which drives itself straight through the middle of her photographs. Some of her images are even bicameral like our Parliament house. The panoramas, made by digitally gluing several separate exposures together, seem to conjoin two visual halves into one unified image;

and one image of the Parliamentary Library, made from two adjacent points of view, allows us to look down two bookshelf aisles at once.

There has always been a tableau-like quality to Zahalka's photographs. For example in her series *Welcome to Sydney, 2002*, commissioned by Sydney Airport, new migrants to Sydney from different countries were posed against panoramic Sydney skylines as though they were giant postcards. Within the rectilinear pyramids of these Parliament House images the staff are arranged like actors on a well-lit stage waiting for the curtain to rise. Working with her subjects, Zahalka posed them in their work-settings, sometimes art-directing the furniture and ornaments, and sometimes styling vital details such as the orange electrical lead of the cleaner's vacuum-cleaner which leads our eye in as it snakes across the carpet of the Prime Minister's suite. As Zahalka works on the digital files after they had been captured she further controlled the final image.

This sense of the choreographed enactment of dignified work, rather than the instantaneous grabbing of workers from the midst of the mundanity of their labours, is not new in Australian photography. The photography of Wolfgang Sievers is another precedent to Zahalka's approach. (Sievers did not participate in the 1980s *Parliament House Construction Photography Project*, though his contemporaries Max Dupain and David Moore did.) Sievers built his reputation constructing elaborate promotional photographs in factories, from which the worker-subjects were often sent home for clean shirts, shaved and cleaned-up, and posed as though they were masters of their machinery, which was dramatically lit against darkness. In front of Sievers' camera even the gruggest factory looked dramatic, and the most grueling work felt heroic. No wonder Sievers' photographs, originally taken to promote individual businesses, eventually became iconic images for Australia as a whole. Although not as extreme and artificial as this, Zahalka's photographs do endow the staff of Parliament

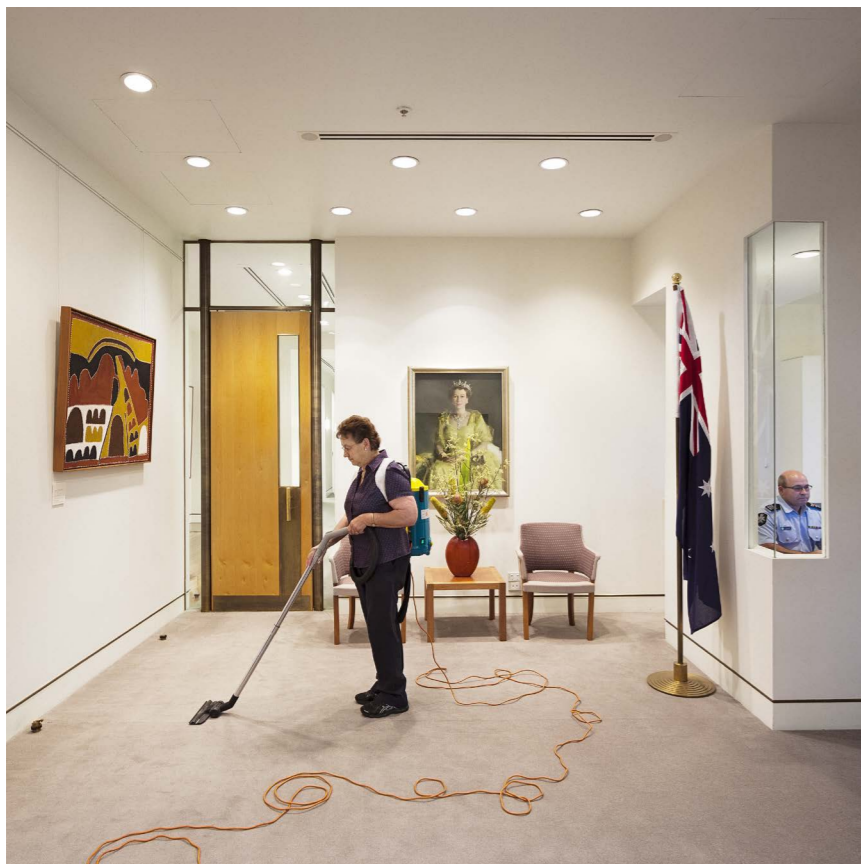


Artist at work

House with worth and national value. The image of the pond cleaner scrubbing the bottom of the ceremonial pond in the House's forecourt, as the hose loops around his legs like a lazy eel, is not ironic. All edifices, no matter how grand, and all institutions, no matter how complex, require dedicated staff from top to bottom, and from outer perimeter garden to inner sanctum. All play their part. Even the cabinet table, around which crucial decisions will shortly be made 'in camera', needs to be cleaned, by somebody.

With a formally tuned, but visually witty, sensibility Zahalka has documented these diverse staff members in their diverse work environments; describing, twenty-five years after it was built, Parliament House not as simply a piece of architecture, and not as simply the seat of our government, but as a place, a symbiosis of people, power and architecture.

**Dr Martyn Jolly**



*Cleaner and Australian Federal Police Officer,  
Prime Minister's Office, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 80cm  
Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra

Queenie McKenzie Rainbow Dreaming (1992). Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra © Artist.  
William Dargie Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II (c. 1954). Collection National Museum of Australia, Canberra © Artist's Estate.



*Parliamentary Security Officer, Cleaner and Catering  
Staff, Main Committee Room Corridor, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 80cm  
Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra

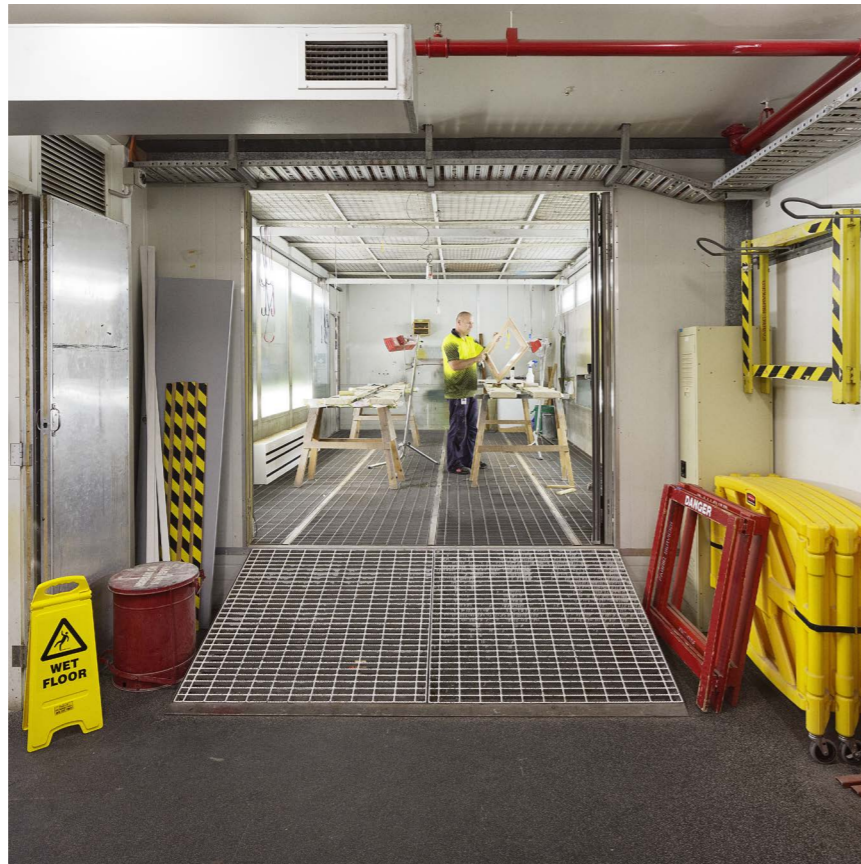




*Art Services Officer, Furniture Store, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 80cm  
Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra



*Assistant Maintenance Officer,  
Upholstery Workshop, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 80cm  
Courtesy of the artist



*Painter, Spray Paint Booth, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 80cm  
Courtesy of the artist



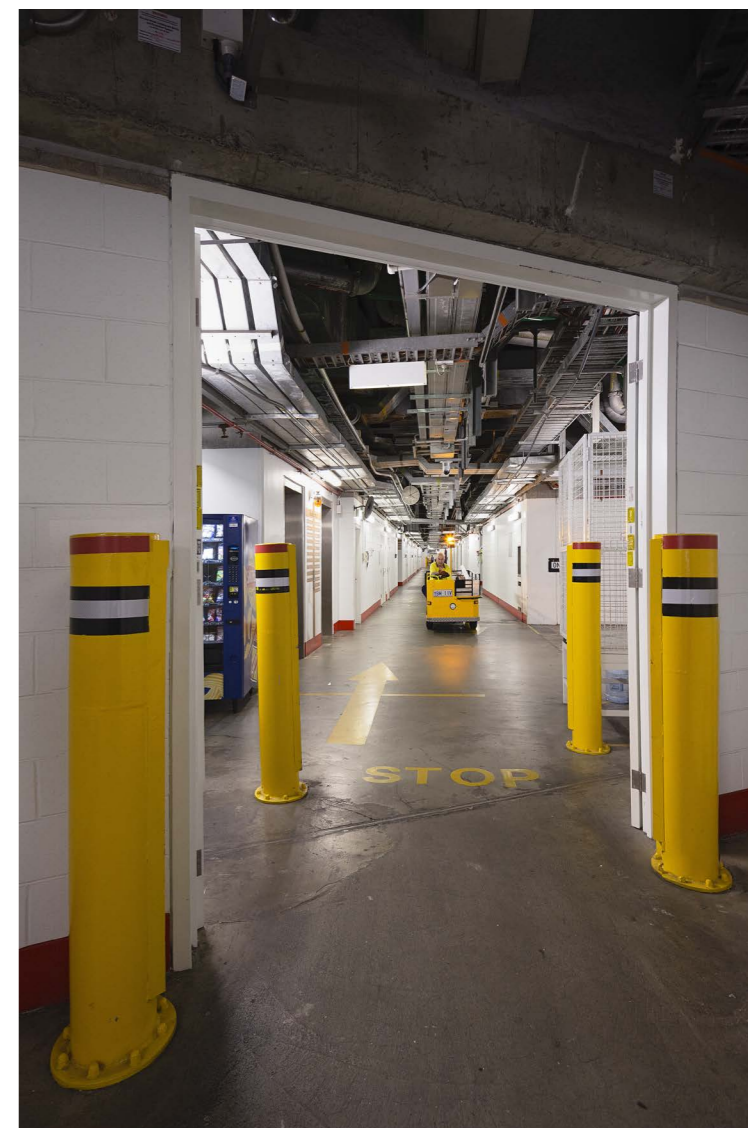
*Art Services Staff, Art Store, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 80cm  
Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra



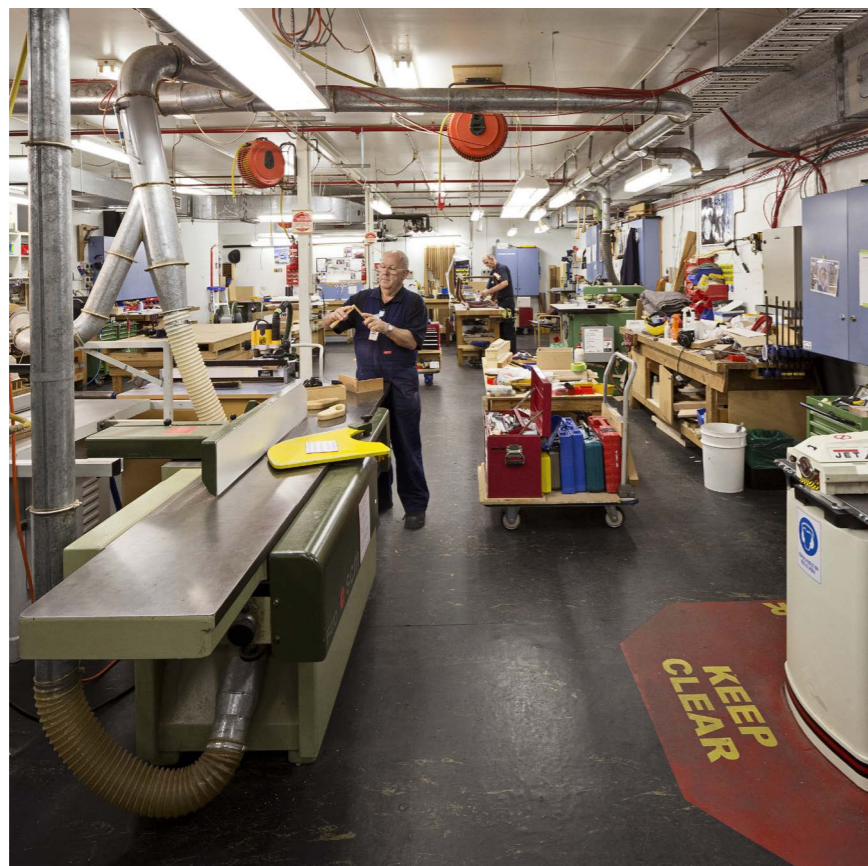
*Marble Foyer, Parliament House, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 160cm  
Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra



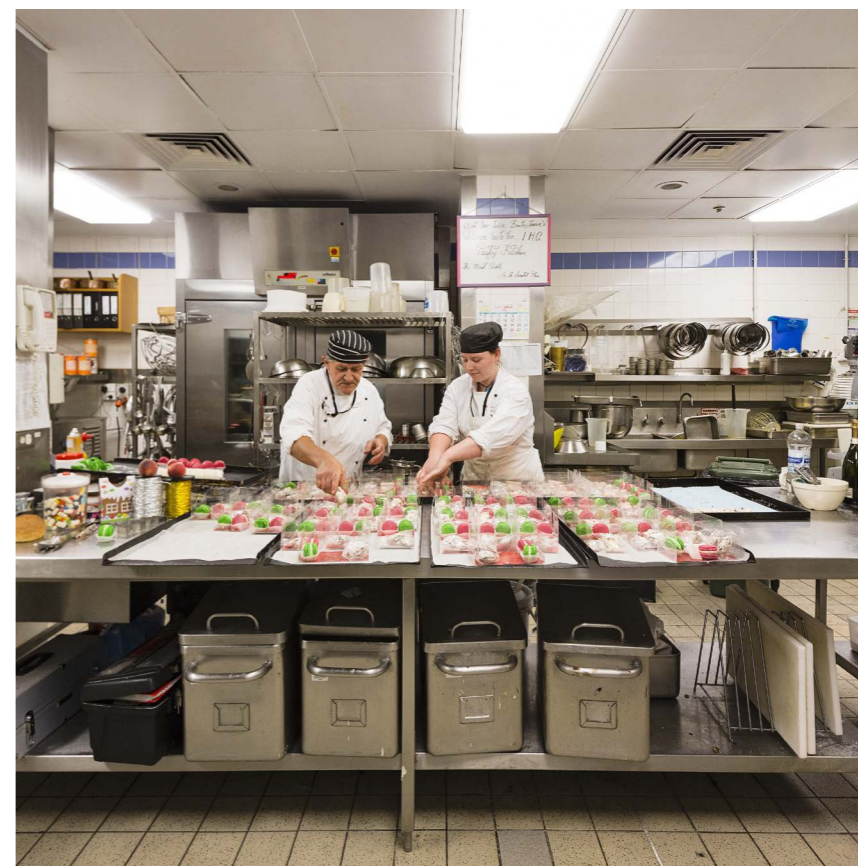
*Cleaners, Cabinet Room, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 80cm  
Courtesy of the artist



*Loading Dock Officer, Basement, 2014*  
Inkjet print 120cm x 80cm  
Courtesy of the artist



*Carpenters, Carpentry Workshop, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 80cm  
Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra



*Head Pastry Chef and Assistant,  
Catering Services, Finishing Kitchen, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 80cm  
Courtesy of the artist



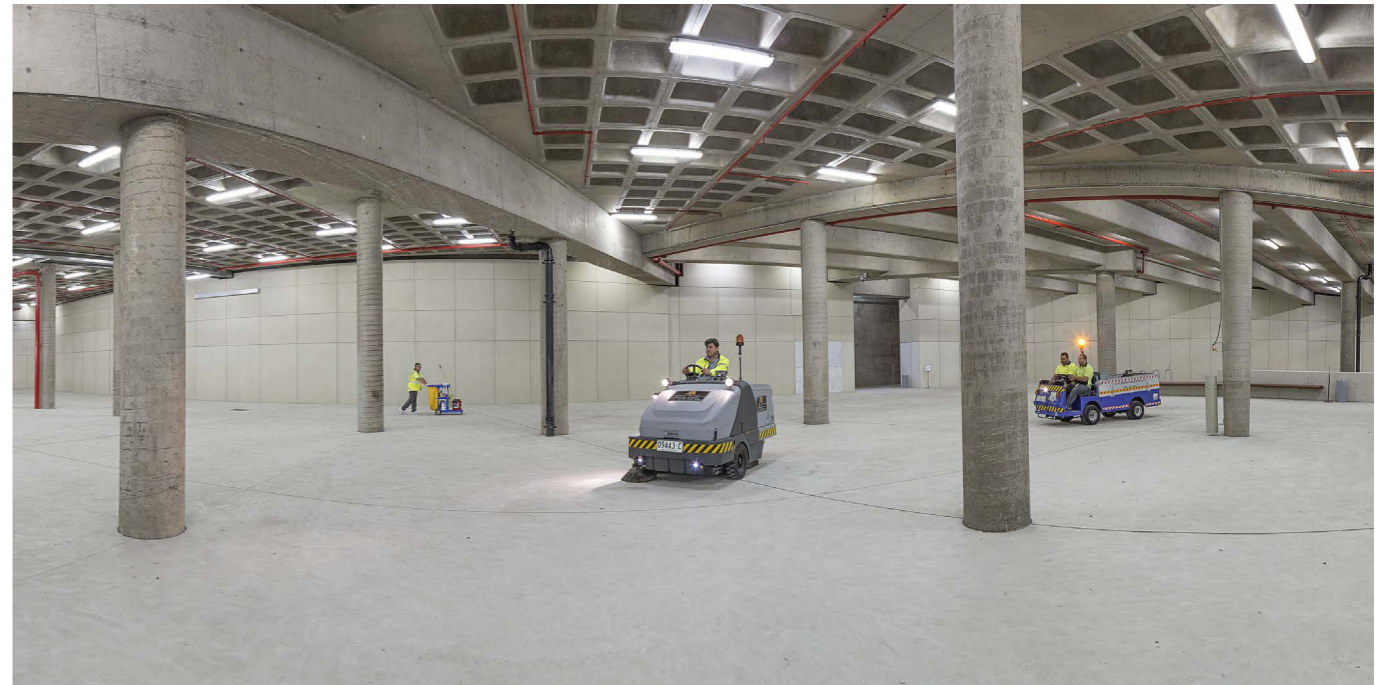
*Administrative Assistant*  
Ground Floor Reading Room, Parliamentary Library, 2014  
Inkjet print 80cm x 120cm  
Courtesy of the artist



*Library Officers, Parliamentary Library, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 120cm  
Courtesy of the artist



*Maintenance Officer and Mechanical  
Fitter, Chillers Plant Room, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 160cm  
Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra



*Cleaning Services Staff,  
Basement Public Carpark, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 160cm  
Courtesy of the artist



*Artworks Manager, Member's Office,  
House of Representatives, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 80cm  
Courtesy of the artist

Guan Wei *The Great War of the Eggplant* (1994), Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra © Artist



*Gardeners, Formal Gardens, 2014*  
Inkjet print 80cm x 80cm  
Parliament House Art Collection, Canberra



## HOUSEKEEPING

*A house is very much like a portrait. I cannot disconnect houses from people. The thought of arrangement, the curves and straight lines. It gives an indication of the character at the heart of it.*

Christian Louboutin, shoemaker

Parliament House is one of the most popular and photographed buildings in Australia. It is both a symbolic place for citizens to see democracy at work and a functional workplace for the thousands of people employed there. In preparing for this commission I looked at images on the Parliamentary website to see how the institution was represented and was surprised to find that people rarely figure in the photographs. Given that the building has over 1 million visitors a year, and during Parliamentary sittings, a maximum workforce of 5000, it seemed strange that there was so little evidence of life there. My aim was to open the arms of its great façade to document the private and public areas of Parliament House and portray the people who maintain and keep it working.

Initially I was taken on a guided tour of the site, which is the size of a small suburb. It provided all the essential services - a cafe, a crèche, hairdressing salon, tennis courts, gym, gallery, library, post office, car park and even a travel agent. Entering through its labyrinthine corridors and its subterranean basement below was like venturing into a theme park. Hundreds of different doors opened into unexpected spaces, some filled with gigantic coloured machinery such as the Chillers, a cooling system for the entire building. Lining the ceilings were silver ducted flews and curling ventilation tubes that wrapped around the architecture like veins and arteries of a great lung filtering and extracting air from the site. I travelled along miles of shelves housing books, videotapes, upholstery fabrics, carpet, crockery and pots. There were hundreds of offices, meetings rooms, storage spaces, carpentry, paint, art and signage stores. Within these stores I saw suitcases, cribs, linen, uniforms, computers, printers, outdoor umbrellas and Art. Amazing Art!

I saw things that no ordinary visitor would see and hoped to bring these people and places they worked in, out into the light. I met staff employed since Parliament's official opening in 1988 and gardeners who had trimmed the hedges, mowed the lawns and pruned the trees since their first planting. They all seemed to take great pride working in the building and many commented on how they particularly loved spending time in its gardens. I rode in a little orange jeep and looked into carriage lines of dumpster bins snaking through the basement bowels filled with shredded documents and the contents of outgoing parliamentarians' offices during the change of government. Rich photographic pickings indeed.

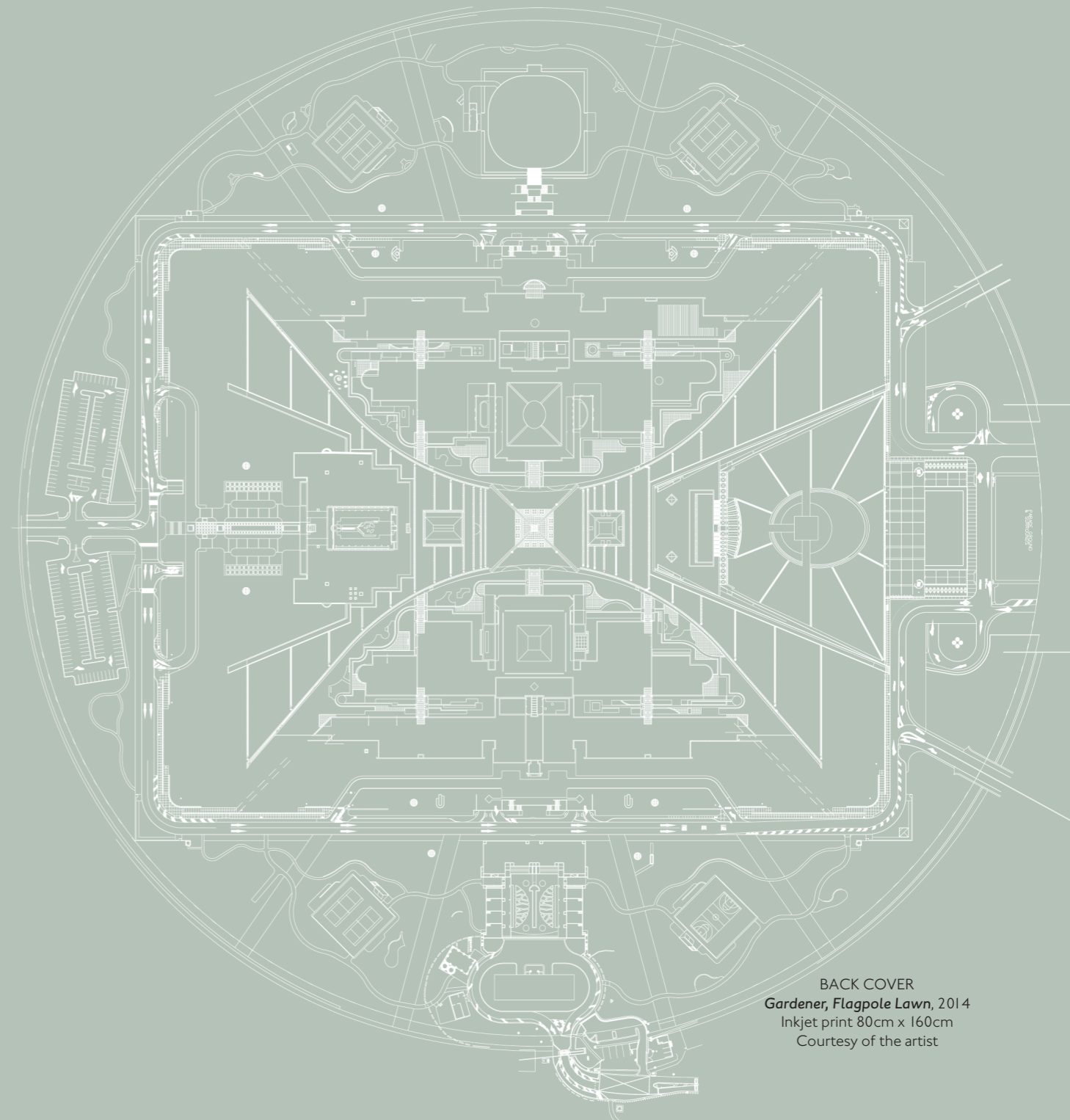
During my visits I encountered the wonderful collection of artworks that line the corridors or hang in Members and Senators offices. Many of the 6,500 artworks rest in the Art Store's air conditioned-controlled rooms waiting for their time to be brought back out into view including my *Wood Chop Stadium* from *Leisureland*. I had great pleasure in revisiting the previous commissioned photographic works and felt proud to be part of this rich cultural history.

Over the last 25 years much of my own work has been concerned with the tradition and conventions of portraiture. I have appropriated styles and techniques from the 'Old Masters' and combined these with new approaches and thinking in contemporary photography. At the heart of my practice is a continued commitment to the documentary photograph as a way of recording, defining, and contextualising the subject. These photographs, set in the ordinary and extraordinary interiors of Parliament House, are more a portrait of a place than of people. But without the people, it wouldn't be a portrait. *Parliament House at work* acknowledges these people and the important role they play in securing, maintaining and breathing life into its hallowed halls.

**Anne Zahalka**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** This commission could not have been realised without the support of my cast and crew. Thankyou to everyone who took part, especially my dream team from the Art Services section of the Department of Parliamentary Services. • Photographic Assistant Tawfik Elgazzar • Digital Retoucher Craig O'Brien, Trannys • Photo Printer, Digital Retoucher Warren Macris, High Res Digital • Framer Graphic Art Mount, Sydney • Graphic Designer Barbara Martusewicz

Anne Zahalka is represented by Arc One Gallery, Melbourne and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.



BACK COVER  
*Gardener, Flagpole Lawn*, 2014  
Inkjet print 80cm x 160cm  
Courtesy of the artist

