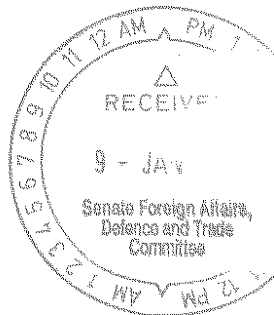


Wednesday, 3 January 2007



Dr Kathleen Dermody
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Suite S1.57
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Dr Demody

Thank you for your letter of 21 November 2006 asking for input into the nature and conduct of Australia's public diplomacy. I am pleased to have the opportunity to offer the following thoughts.

From the time I have spent in the arts sector, it seems to me that many opportunities for the mix of culture and diplomacy and perhaps even more important, the nexus between culture and trade, have not been fully exploited.

For example, although there have been attempts in the past to use culture to underpin initiatives with other countries during periods of exchanges for the development of trade and other relations between countries, it seems that the use of culture was at best last minute, funding was not always related to costs and timing and exploitation of the use of art exhibitions, symphony orchestra tours, etc., were not tied strongly enough to the activities aimed at particular outcomes in such exchanges. I am thinking of the example of an exhibition of Australian Aboriginal Art sent to New Delhi at the time that the Foreign Minister was visiting during trade negotiations in which it seemed that the exhibition was not used as it might have been as an arena to form the background for other negotiations. The same could be said of Australia Week in Moscow (June 2006, which I attended) which had some private ventures promoting Australian Indigenous Art but needed a serious exhibition to underpin the very fine attempt that was made to provide interchange with private and public concerns. The addition of Kostya Tzu was a great advantage to the visibility of the event in Moscow as was the presence of Peter Beattie, Premier of Queensland.

In places like the Indian Ocean Rim, often personal and cultural understanding is the key to advancing diplomatic and other initiatives in the area. As well, in countries where political and diplomatic relations are strained, it is often possible to maintain cultural relations and use them as the way back into relationships in other areas. It is a two-way street and cultural responses in Australia to these areas are as important as any event in the Indian Ocean Rim countries. For example, the Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane, at the Queensland Art Gallery is an amazing event that shows both respect for and interest in countries in the Asia and Pacific regions. Another possibility is to regard Perth, since it is the only major city of Australia on the Indian Ocean, as the valuable window for Australia on the Indian Ocean Rim and could conceivably fulfil that role nationally.



Currently the Art Gallery of Western Australia has a major exhibition of contemporary Indian Art, **Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India**, which opened first in Perth and toured in North America and Mexico, now heading for its second venue in India. This is without precedent and yet little has been done to take advantage of it within diplomatic or trade circles. Partly this was due to the late acceptance of the exhibition by India and the complicated timing resulting from logistics factors that both AGWA and the Asia Society in New York have had to deal with. Further, major exhibitions and tours of major theatrical or musical organizations have to be planned well in advance and do not always fit the lead times of diplomatic or trade programming. However, I think there is room for this to grow and be refined. As with all arts institutions, funding is always a problem, but this could be incorporated in a bigger picture of initiatives in global areas of most importance to Australia.

In summation, the potential for strong cultural content is available for underpinning Australia's diplomatic and other initiatives, but will need advance planning and funding in place to proceed. Secondly, there is an opportunity to build key events and infrastructure that reflect these interests in international relations within Australia itself. To work, all of the above would have to be part of a long term strategy for the future international interests of Australia.

I hope these thoughts are of interest.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan R Dodge', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Alan R Dodge
Director
Art Gallery of Western Australia