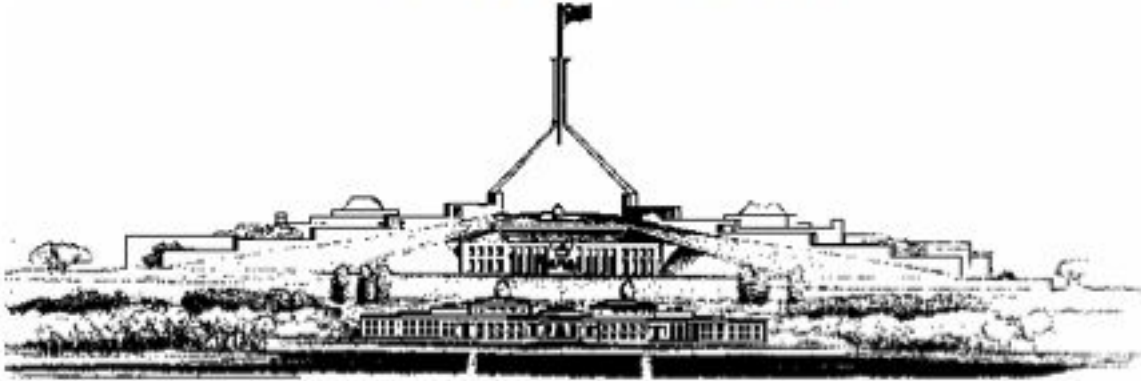




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONDOLENCES

Churcher, Ms Elizabeth 'Betty' Ann Dewar, AO

SPEECH

Thursday, 14 May 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 14 May 2015
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Questioner
Speaker Dreyfus, Mark, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Deputy Manager of Opposition Business) (10:35): With the death of Betty Churcher, Australia has lost one of its great champions for the arts. She is remembered and respected for her service as Director of the National Gallery of Australia from 1990 to 1997—its first and so far only female director. But it is as a communicator and enthusiast for the arts that she is most remembered. She had an eye for art with critical and discerning judgement and she had the ability to communicate that judgement and a love for art to a wider audience. She took art to the Australian public and welcomed everyone to the National Gallery. She made it an art gallery for the people.

Betty's lifelong mission was to make art understandable, accessible and available to all Australians. She took art to the people with grace and class, and people responded to her enthusiasm, her deep knowledge and her ability to share that knowledge and enthusiasm. She made art popular but not populist. She maintained the highest scholarly and curatorial standards. She brought historic and hugely significant exhibitions of great art to Australia. She showed Australians masterpieces of world culture that we had never seen before. She opened our eyes and taught us to see. Not only were those exhibitions of artistic significance; they were commercially successful. Betty Churcher was a highly competent arts administrator.

Betty Churcher came to Canberra to the National Gallery of Australia after distinguished service as Director of the Art Gallery of Western Australia. She had chosen not to pursue a career as a painter, although she had shown early talent. Instead she chose to become an arts administrator and educator, and we are all the richer for that choice that she made.

After she retired from the gallery she continued her passion for education through her writings and television programs. Betty's son, Peter, said that her life and art were inextricably linked, and I quote:

Art for my mother was not something to perplex, or to over-conceptualise. It was not something floating high up in the intellectual ether, or out of anyone's reach, but its impulse and power was right there in one's own heart

Betty was supported throughout her career by her late husband Roy, a distinguished artist. Labor extends its sincere condolences to Betty's sons Ben, Paul, Peter and Tim, and to her grandchildren.