

28 October, 2021

REFERENCE FOR IAN STRANGE

To Whom It May Concern

I am writing to acknowledge the incredible success of Ian Strange in his tenure as the Guest Artistic Director at The Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA), in what has been a milestone transformation for the State Art Museum.

In June of 2020, after my appointment as Director of The Art Gallery of Western Australia, one of my first acts was to appoint Ian Strange in the role of Guest Artistic Director. This was the first such position in the Gallery's history, and to my knowledge, the first Artistic Director position at a major public art museum in Australia.

Ian is one of Australia's leading contemporary artists, and one of Western Australia's most successful artistic exports. His talents don't just lie in his work as a visual artist, but his experiences running a multidisciplinary studio, curating arts projects, running large scale collaborative projects, films, installations, and immersive works with large teams, as well as his experience in design, architecture, film, TV, and documentary film. This breadth of experience made him an ideal creative leader for the Gallery in this moment of change, and I was thrilled to convince him to return to Western Australia to take on this position, bringing his insight and energy to transform the Gallery for a new generation.

The Guest Artistic Director role was designed as an executive leadership position which oversaw the creative outputs of the Gallery. The role gave Ian the autonomy to reimagine the Gallery and provide the creative framework for its new vision. This included a comprehensive rebrand centering digital, film and content production, reinvigorated programming, a renewed focus on the building's unique architecture and on design, exhibition design and wayfinding, as well as new commercial operations, partnerships, collaborations, publishing projects and forward capital works development. I can confidently say that Ian exceeded my greatest expectations.

I would like to outline some of Ian's key achievements while serving as Artistic Director:

Consistent with the Gallery's 5-year strategic plan, Ian built a creative framework that considered AGWA's short- and long-term ambitions as an art museum, arts communicator, and physical site.

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Most visibly, Ian led the creation of the Gallery's new brand, design, and communication systems, holistically revolutionising the way the Gallery looks, operates, and thinks about design and language inside, outside, and in digital spaces. This extended from the physical architecture of the building, to all digital, film, media, programming, and outward-facing content production. It included the production of a new language guide, new exhibition design guidelines and systems, wayfinding systems, digital templating, all Gallery signage, physical and digital Gallery Maps, all-of-Gallery lighting design, and new exhibition lighting design systems.

From a digital and communications perspective, Ian developed the first iteration of the AGWA Digital Lab. A framework and new internal team dedicated to content production, broadcast and digital, along with the development of the AGWA Paper (a physical and digital broadsheet). The AGWA Digital Lab sat within the larger AGWA Digital Strategy developed by Ian to position the Gallery not just as a digital content producer, but a broadcaster — growing new digital distribution systems, content creation, film, streaming, content, and media partnerships, as well as the expansion of AGWA's publishing imprint and slate. This has set a new benchmark for how AGWA communicates more effectively to both a more diverse local audience as well as globally.

One of Ian's most important achievements was the sensitive renovation of the Gallery's brutalist building. While creating a brand and design system that complemented and drew from the building itself, Ian worked to return the building to its original architectural intent and function. This vision extended to me being able to successfully finance the renovation of the Gallery's foyer, entranceway, and design store, as well as the refresh and re-design of every Gallery space, concourse, exteriors, and interstitial spaces within the Gallery. This involved reinstating windows and "opening up" the building and design plans, in-line with the original architect's vision for the building, creating new entranceways and sensitive additions to each space. Historically, our building has posed difficulty for people, often misunderstood in its Brutalism, and creating barriers for entry. Ian's unique and exacting eye for detail has allowed us instead to embrace our building and reinstate it as a significant example of destination Brutalist architecture, open to all.

Much of Ian's time at the Gallery was spent working between external and internal teams. This included working alongside teams delivering the \$10 million AGWA Rooftop capital works project. His ability to collaborate in the delivery of complex practical outcomes while maintaining a focus on larger vision is a testament to his abilities as a creative communicator. This ability to present a clear creative vision to our diverse stakeholders has been critical to the Gallery's growth in this time. It has directly contributed to a dramatic increase in public and private philanthropy, membership, capital works funding, and the development of The Simon Lee Foundation for Asian Contemporary Art.

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By far Ian's greatest achievement in his time at AGWA was the conceptualisation and realisation of *The View From Here*, which saw the culmination of Ian's vision. Put together in collaboration with Curator of West Australian and Australian Art Robert Cook, *The View From Here* was AGWA's largest ever exhibition of Western Australian art, with more than 200 Western Australian artists and 111 commissioned works, artistic projects, and acquisitions, representing a hugely diverse line-up of artists. *The View From Here* became a \$2.3 million celebration of Western Australian artistic talent and creativity, focusing on the art of this place — heralding a new era at the Gallery and confidently introducing our vision for the future.

Ian also led the creative team and development of the creative campaign and digital strategy for *The View From Here* Gallery relaunch. This involved overseeing the creation of a custom microsite, 28 short films on Western Australian artists, and a broadsheet of original writing and photography — commissioning work from more than 38 contributors and creatives to bring this to life. Coinciding with the completion of his time at the Gallery, the scale and ambition of *The View From Here* was a testament to the vast and deep creative transformation he led.

Ian worked collaboratively at the highest leadership level with internal and external stakeholders, to identify, implement, and review challenges in staffing, resourcing, philanthropy, forward programming, and capital works projects. He navigated the challenges of delivering a complex creative vision and modernising modes of working within the institution with aplomb.

It was a pleasure to work and collaborate with Ian to deliver this bold vision and transformation at AGWA. I am proud to say Ian has made a huge and positive impact as the Gallery's first Artistic Director. He leaves behind an important legacy for the institution, the state, and the art and artists of Western Australia.

Sincerely,



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The Art Gallery of Western Australia