

Submission from Heather Burness regarding the terms of reference of the inquiry into the future use of the Fitters' Workshop in the Kingston arts precinct

Introduction

For the sake of transparency, I am an independent, professional artist with an established print based practice in the ACT. I have received funding from both the ACT government and non- government sources. I use Megalo for some technical processes that are not accommodated by my print studio at home. I have been practicing since 1989. I was instrumental in negotiating with the ACT government in retaining the print equipment held by the now defunct Studio One, and now by Megalo, for the ongoing access of residents of the ACT and region. I have a passion for the arts, a passion for print and for community access to print equipment and workshop facilities. I am also a music lover and listener and a concert goer, having subscribed to the Australian Chamber Orchestra for the last seven years as one example of my commitment. I believe the diversity of creative expression in a community, be that visual art, music, performance or writing make for a richer place to explore human existence and potential.

Terms of Reference:

the best use of the Fitters workshop, taking into account the acoustic qualities, heritage value, its location, cost and community demand of the building

The best use of the Fitter's workshop must insure maximum use of the facility 7 days per week by a like minded and similar, or at least synchronistic organization, as its neighbour, the Glass Workshop. The value add that would come from this is integral the success of the precinct. Megalo fits this bill perfectly. The coexistence of these two organisations would be beneficial to the precinct creating a dynamic area attracting visitors to the ACT, both international and local every day. Print is a workshop-based practice with a semi industrial historic context, as has Glass Art production. Music performance and other activities that have been mentioned by others, including an ACT government department, as possible uses of the Fitters Workshop simply do not have this similar context. The plans for the refit of the building to house Megalo are in sympathy with its industrial heritage as a workshop.

As regards the conjecture about the quality of the acoustics of the building, which in no small part are the reason for this inquiry I suggest, have never been independently, objectively verified or comparatively studied. What are they compared to other venues in the ACT? Indeed what are they? How good are they? How has this been established? I know that Peter Sculthorpe, the eminent Australian composer, has commented that they are "interesting". This does not establish their credentials for live performance. I call upon government to set in train an independent, objective and comparative study of the acoustics of the building. Its findings should not be influenced by subjective input but be grounded on well-established methods of studying acoustics in performance venues.

A large percentage of the costs of the refit for Megalo to occupy the building are for basic infrastructure, which would also be needed to make the building suitable

for other purposes. There would be minimal cost savings by making the building suitable for other purposes, such as music performance or festivals etc.

I also believe that there has been a goodly quantity of public monies already spent on the scoping study, and also this inquiry. The delay to the tabling of the Precinct Plan now caused by this inquiry adds further to this cost. The decision-making regarding this issue has been compromised by political and other loyalties. This has further added to the costs involved. I am a taxpayer in this town and I strongly object to this waste of my money.

Megalo will be used everyday and the original decision to place the organisation in this venue is appropriate and should be seen through expeditiously.

options for alternative venues for use by a range of community music groups

There are many options for a variety of musical performances in Canberra. At the last International Music Festival alone there were at least 9 that I knew of.

options for alternative purpose built accommodation for Megalo Print Studio

There aren't any on the horizon that I know of and certainly not without considerable government expenditure.

any other relevant matter.

The description of the interior of the building as "extraordinary" in a Hansard transcription of the proceedings of the Assembly which led to this inquiry is irrelevant and not true. To be honest, it is a disused industrial space that needs a lot of work done to it in order for it to be used by the public for any purpose. It just happens to be a heritage building with a wonderful façade next to another visual arts facility in which the government has committed considerable sums. The use of the Fitter's Workshop for Megalo would be a sound financial investment in such circumstances, adding to the original investment in the Glass workshop.

The use of the building for general non specific purposes such as performances, festivals, markets etc would be a wimpy decision and a cop out leading to under utilization of the building.

Megalo has been housed for too long in places such as ex -schools and out of that way sites with irrelevant coexistence networks in place. This does not make for a strong arts sector in this town and adds to the reasons why ACT artists, including myself, make and exhibit their works elsewhere. We lose our young artists interstate. I would much prefer to exhibit and make work at a Megalo housed at the Fitter's Workshop in an exciting arts hub that attracts national and international visitors rather than a Megalo housed at an ex -CIT Campus with a leaky roof.

Heather Burness

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