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LAURINE · DIGGINS · FINE · ART

Tribute to Lauraine Diggins by Ms Anne-Marie Schwirtlich AM

Lauraine and I met through the good offices of the Commonwealth Government as we both served on the committee of an entity that rejoiced in the name of the Taxation Incentives for the Arts Scheme. A great deal of the committee's work concerned gifts of art to publicly accessible institutions and Lauraine was appointed for her great knowledge of Australian art, particularly Indigenous art.

Together with colleagues, including Antonia Syme, Suzanne Davies and Alan Dodge, we considered remarkable works being donated to institutions and the valuations placed on the works. Lauraine's knowledge of the art market, of the history of individual pictures, of the strengths and weaknesses of artists and of phases of their careers was deeply impressive. Her insistence on rigorous committee paperwork was legendary and she was charmingly tenacious in arguing a point. I learnt an enormous amount from her about art and the business of art.

It was my great good fortune to come to Melbourne in 2003 to work at the State Library of Victoria and Lauraine was one of the first people to make me welcome. It could be that she had some subtle indoctrination in mind because our very first outing was to a Carlton match. Needless to say my support of Collingwood remained a secret from Lauraine.

Luckily, there was always so much more to talk about than football. Over lunches and coffee our conversations would inevitably turn to reading and art. Lauraine's conviction that art made a profound difference to life and its understanding and enjoyment was intrinsic to everything. Her interest in artists and their nurturing; in strengthening and broadening art criticism; in supporting art scholarship and in engaging governments to better support the arts - all of these were fertile and stimulating grounds for discussion. As was the evolution of Australia's public galleries and the development of emerging leaders in, and for, all of those institutions.

Lauraine cared passionately about the fabric of our artistic and cultural life and believed that it was a privilege to do so.

None of Lauraine's commitment, curiosity and intensity waned as she contended with her illness. She faced the diagnosis squarely and with an openness to new treatments. She spoke with equanimity about the effects on her. She really was gallant.

We have not only lost a fabulous friend and colleague but a wise and clever contributor to, and advocate for, the arts in Australia and we are all the poorer for that.