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## LAURINE · DIGGINS · FINE · ART

**Tribute to Lauraine Diggins by The Hon Steve Dimopoulos MP  
Member for Oakleigh and Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer**



When Michael asked me to speak at Lauraine's memorial, I felt equally unqualified and touched.

My heartfelt condolences to Michael, Nerida and their families and to all who loved Lauraine.

I've only known Lauraine for a relatively short time but I have been struck by her impact.

The first time I met Lauraine was at her gallery. I was only to be there for a short time, just to say hello introduced by a mutual friend Chris Smale. I know very little about art and to be honest heading to meet Lauraine I felt a bit apprehensive lest I came across as ignorant or worse as a philistine. I need not have worried because I was made to feel at ease instantly. I was there for hours. I couldn't leave – I was captivated by Lauraine and Michael's knowledge of art and enveloped by their passion.

Lauraine had an extraordinary intellect and astonishing knowledge but she had the incredible knack of sharing it in a way that made people feel part of the journey, the discovery – there was no stupid question for Lauraine.

By sharing her knowledge and passion – she demystified the arts – she gave me the window within which to see art in a way I have never seen it before – when she would introduce a painting to me in conversation or in the gallery, she would figuratively paint a picture of the artist; of the time – the period; the social or political context of the painting; the other works by the artist; what the painting meant then and what it means now; where it once hung; where it hangs now and why that is important – she'd share this knowledge in a conversational style, giving me the space and the break in the conversation to participate by way of comment or question or by sharing my own knowledge, as scant as it clearly was.

She spoke with equal love about more recent works by Australian artists as she did of the big historical names of Australian art world.

That demonstrated to me someone who was a true lover of the arts, someone who found value in art through the ages – she could have been a real arts snob but that was not her, she was a true egalitarian.

Her contribution to the arts is for others more learned than I in this field to reflect on but I want to reflect briefly on her love of public institutions and their role in society.

We spent hours talking about the importance of strong public institutions and her love for the National Gallery of Victoria. And this is what made Lauraine so special – yes she dealt in art, yes she was a business woman but this Frankston High girl was first and foremost a proud Victorian.

She was passionate about assisting public institutions in acquiring good works that contribute to public collections. Trading in art was not a transactional affair for Lauraine, it was not about the highest bidder or the biggest name, it was about honouring the work and its contribution to the collection.

If Lauraine gave you an assurance on the provenance of a work, you needn't look any further.

But of course she would do more than that, she would provide strategic, considered and tactical advice to a gallery about how and if this piece contributes to its existing collection and whether it is likely to come on the market again – the kind of advice you can provide only when you are in the market yourself yes, when you have knowledge yes - but equally importantly and less frequently found in the arts - passion and the right values and ethics. Lauraine had values and ethics in spades.

This made her an unparalleled resource for public institutions and through them a resource for benefactors and governments who fund the acquisitions and ultimately a resource for the public in whose name these institutions are established and maintained.

Lauraine believed that everybody should have access to extraordinary art and they should be supported to access it and that's why her heart beat of public acquisitions including making very significant personal donations to the NGV and on many occasions loaning pieces to the gallery for long periods of time.

Having Michael and Lauraine discussing art with you over a glass of Scotchman's Hill wine was a rare privilege which I have had a few times but that I wish I could have one last time.

I remember the first time the Premier of Victoria, Daniel Andrews met Michael, it was at an intimate dinner at a friend's house – a lovely home full of incredible Australian art. The dinner

started at 6.30 pm and the Premier was schedule to leave at 8.30. Well, 8.30 came and went, so did 9.30 as did 10.30 and no amount of pushing and prodding could get him out the door because he and Michael got on famously.

As we left around 11 pm, the Premier turned to me and said “he is extraordinary, I could have stayed longer”. I responded ‘you should meet his wife’.

Sure enough some months later at a dinner at Lauraine’s gallery the Premier was treated to the rare privilege of a discussion about art with Lauraine and Michael – as a duo. Lauraine then took him around the gallery and showed him the pieces – they spent a long time talking about art while the rest of us tucked into the wine. That was another late dinner, a much later departure than the Premier’s scheduled departure time. While that says something about Daniel Andrews’ love for art and wine, it says much more about Lauraine and Michael.

The Premier was very impressed with Lauraine and told me that he was keen to have her play a more formal role in art in the public realm.

There are thousands of people that have and will continue to enjoy the collection at the NGV and other galleries that will never know the contribution Lauraine has made to their experience. Lauraine’s life was one that indelibly touched Victoria’s and Australia’s public life.

As another great lover of art, Paul Keating, once said. “The only reward in a public life is public progress. You stand back and say ‘What did I get out of it?’ You look around, and the place is better, and that’s it.

Well the place is certainly and immeasurably better because Lauraine was here.

Thank you

**Memorial Service to celebrate the life of Lauraine Diggins OAM  
Monday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2019  
The Pavillion, Arts Centre Melbourne  
Steve Dimopoulos**