

28 July, 2018

Extract, with permission, from a weekly newsletter by John McDonald, art critic for *The Sydney Morning Herald*. To subscribe to his (free) newsletter see www.johnmcdonald.net.au .

From
John
McDonald ☉

You know that feeling when you've no sooner arrived at your destination and you hear everything's gone wrong at home? I experienced that the other night, having just landed at Narita, in anticipation of this year's Echigo-Tsumari Triennale. The first news from home was that the Nine Network had just absorbed Fairfax Media, which publishes the newspapers I contribute to every week...

...Leaving one story hanging by its fingernails I then learned that Dolla Merrillees is resigning from the directorship of the Powerhouse Museum as a result of the ludicrous fashion ball (intended as a fund-raiser), that failed badly and ran up a bill. Well, it was a dumb idea, but not as dumb – or anywhere near as expensive – as the idea of moving the Powerhouse to Parramatta.

The fashion ball looks like one of those desperate gambits somebody dreams up when a museum is floating in limbo. With the impending move – or should we simply say “destruction” – on the horizon, it's hard to plan shows, make new acquisitions, attract donors and sponsors, and keep good staff. The ball was like the last fling on the Titanic.

Now that she's no longer director, I can say that I never imagined Dolla was actually keen on the move to Parramatta, although she always made the right, supportive noises. The real horror is that the government is using her resignation as an opportunity to remove the position of “director” and replace her with a “manager” that will oversee the relocation.

We've seen many times that when a gallery or museum director is replaced by a manager, disaster soon follows.

Of course, it could be argued that the disaster has already happened, but until they start demolishing the building there must still be some hope that this ill-conceived, secretive, hugely expensive piece of bastardry can be stopped, or at least paused until Gladys's team pay the ultimate price at the ballot box for the ruin they've inflicted on Sydney...