

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/in-sydney-s-west-we-know-all-about-getting-a-good-haircut-and-the-powerhouse-backflip-fits-the-bill-20200706-p559gv.html>

(and also in the Daily Telegraph, 7 July, 2020)

7 July, 2020

In Sydney's west we know all about getting a good haircut, and the Powerhouse backflip fits the bill

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Need to shake off that lockdown shag? Around \$15 will get you a handsome cut from any of Parramatta's George Street huddle of expert barbers. Located just a block away from the coming Powerhouse museum, these worldly tonsorialists are the best.

We're used to a good haircut in western Sydney. But the one our friends to the east just gave us is an absolute beauty. At the very moment the world is re-thinking its "ownership" of culture, history and artifice, inner Sydney deemed that western Sydney – the country's fastest-growing and most culturally diverse region – could not be trusted as primary custodians of a bold new Powerhouse.

Western Sydney is now enduring the indignity of the barber gleefully waving a mirror across the back of the cut, assuring us the retention of the museum's Ultimo site is a "win-win". Worse, we're assured "cultural vandalism", a "disaster" and "obliteration" have been averted. Hardly a vote of confidence in a region that continues to produce some of the world's most renown cultural figures, among them, artist Ben Quilty and Melissa Chiu, director of the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum.

The walk-back of the Powerhouse promise sends a troubling signal to western Sydney's creative sector. (Remember that line from then Premier Baird that "the west deserves to be first not second"?) The message is: you're not up to this, and you're politically expendable. It is indicative of a broader weakening in political commitment to, and apparent loss of confidence in, the capacity of Australia's regions to drive economic recovery.

The same week the NSW government revised its position on the Powerhouse, it announced plans for a \$48.2 million "Tech Central" spanning Central to Eveleigh. The initiative will "provide 50,000 square metres of affordable space for start-up and scale-up businesses" and is predicted to create "up to 25,000 new jobs". Sounds exciting. If you're a local.

Only days before the Tech Central announcement, comparable NSW government funding for suburban and rural start-ups came to an end. The Boosting Business Innovation program was beginning to bear fruit. In western Sydney, the scheme supported the swift local adaptation of medical face mask manufacturing capacity.

Other retreats have been less obvious. The Sydney Metro West, mooted to redress the eastward exodus of western Sydney workers, now has far more stops at the Sydney end, with only Westmead, Parramatta and Sydney Olympic Park making the cut on the nine-station route.

And let's not even go there on the stadiums policy, with a new one set to be built at Moore Park, and, well, not much happening at Homebush.

A hair cut on the Powerhouse is one thing. Death by a thousand cuts is something else.

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