

June 23, 2021
Hawke Centre, Adelaide

5:03 / 57:34

Perspectives with Lisa Havilah: Reframing the Institution



[HawkeCentre](#)
1.63K subscribers
Subscribe

Powerhouse Museum Chief Executive Lisa Havilah presents her visionary approach to leadership. Renowned for reshaping tested institutional structures into culturally and commercially vibrant contemporary arts epicentres, Havilah shares her personal ideology on the new role that cultural institutions will play and the moments that have shaped her innovative, ambitious approach to reframing the institution. This will include insights into collaborative approaches to exhibition making, strategic development and the important role that artists can play in establishing new ecologies and networks with an institution. From starting an Artist Run Space in Wollongong to undertaking the largest cultural infrastructure renewal project in Australia since the Sydney Opera House, Havilah's entrepreneurial, community engaged approach to shaping the contemporary art institution, investing into artists and national art policy is undeniable. Presented as part of Perspectives - an initiative developed by The Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre, ACE Open and Guildhouse.

[www.hawkecentre.unisa.edu.au](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDkCKQS_o9s)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDkCKQS_o9s

Listen from 30 minutes to 41 minutes

Later talks have been advertised here:

Remix Summit, Sydney, March 2022

REMIX Sydney is Australia's biggest Creative Industries summit. A national gathering that brings together pioneers from a myriad of industries to explore the future of the creative and cultural industries, creative cities and the creative economy. REMIX Sydney 2022 will be a special one-off summit with the support of the national RISE program created to help the arts and entertainment sector reactivate and the event is designed to support the recovery and reinvention of the cultural sector after a tumultuous year

<https://www.uts.edu.au/partners-and-community/events/remix-summit-sydney-2022>

<https://www.remixsummits.com/speaker/lisa-havilah/>

Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Friday 20 October 2023:

'Ownership, Voice, and the Civic Leadership'

'This session centres particularly on the museum in its local environment and explores how different museums are proactively embracing a role in civic leadership. '

Opening address: Lisa Havilah, Chief Executive, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney

Chaired by Dr Gus Casely-Hayford, Director of V&A East
Laura Pye, Director, National Museums Liverpool
Dr Jago Cooper, Director, Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia
Sonia Solicari, Director of Museum of the Home

Q&A

See: [https://vanda-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/2023/10/03/17/21/05/645e4501-003c-40c3-8828-2f679a2ab4bf/Museums%20of%20the%20Future_Conference%20Programme_19-20%20October%202023%20\(2\).pdf](https://vanda-production-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/2023/10/03/17/21/05/645e4501-003c-40c3-8828-2f679a2ab4bf/Museums%20of%20the%20Future_Conference%20Programme_19-20%20October%202023%20(2).pdf)

Comments on the 2021 talk:

Kylie Winkworth: 29 November 2023

We already know what will be in the EIS – not because anyone has broken a non-disclosure agreement – but because the proponents of this project have never wavered from their intent to rip the heart out of the Powerhouse Museum, evict all the collections, shrink the museum, change its remit to contemporary arts, and turn once dedicated exhibition galleries into venue hire and function spaces – ***sweating every single asset*** as the MAAS CEO shamelessly puts it in her public talks on ***how to break the museum***. The MAAS CEO and head of Create NSW are treating an historic public museum as if it is their private property, doing exactly what they want regardless of community objections, government policy and public statements by the Minister and the previous government. It is appalling that this is still happening in secret, without accountability or the transparency that Labor promised.

...The CEO's stated vision for the PHM is to ***ignore the weight of language, history and architecture***, and ***not bow down to the monuments of the 20th century***, to quote from her talks on breaking the museum. ***Now is the perfect time to be undoing our institutions*** she says. The MAAS CEO has no intention of preserving the Wran legacy. She has spent the last five years undoing it, if you paid attention to what is happening in the museum and read the annual reports. Ignoring family audiences and kids is part of the vision, along with ***never explaining or trying to educate***. That is reflected in education participated at MAAS, down to less than half the numbers when she started in 2019. The MAAS CEO has ignored the spirit and intent of Labor's announcement on 2 September, just as she did the former government's announcement on 4 July 2020. That is why she is determined to close the museum and hide everything to do with her plans for the museum from public scrutiny. Next she will ask the staff to sign NDAs.

John McDonald: 2 Dec 2023

In his regular newsletter and web entry, McDonald includes comments on Lisa Havilah's speech in Adelaide in 2021: **Extract here...**

'I was recently sent a link to a speech Lisa made in Adelaide in 2021, where she outlined her ideas about cultural institutions. The title was revealing enough: "Unmaking the Institution".

She explained her methods with breathtaking candour.

"I didn't ask the audience what they want. I ignored the data...."

"In every instance – *even when I wasn't going to* – I always asked 'How can I help?'" (my italics)

"...never explaining or trying to educate."

And perhaps, best of all: "...not responding until it no longer matters and that's a very special bureaucratic strategy."

I could hardly believe what I was hearing. It was like Robespierre making a speech telling an audience why the Terror was such good policy, or Stalin patiently explaining the way to run a totalitarian state – all for the ultimate benefit of “the community”.

And what are we to make of a Museum CEO who says: “we will not be a museum that bows down to the monuments of the 20th century”? What kind of museum brazenly scorns the monuments of the past? Can such an institution be trusted to care for the rare and precious items in its collection? As it is, significant reports of damage inflicted on items through the indecent haste with which they were bundled into storage, or allowed to be vandalised during rave parties, have been swept under the carpet by the government, and simply denied by the CEO.

The care of the collection is the very first duty of a director and her curators. Neglect, let alone denials that are hotly disputed by those at the coal face, should be capital offences.

The bit about “not responding until it no longer matters” is precisely what we see at present, as the loud and persistent questions raised by the friends of the Museum, and by MPs such as Robert Borsak, are ignored or downplayed. Labor, which promised to lift the veil of secrecy imposed by the Coalition, is now asking people to sign Non-Disclosure Agreements! No plans for the “renewal” of Ultimo have been made public or put up for discussion and debate.

Leo Schofield’s 1,001 remarkable Objects, which absorbed two years and \$4 million, is set to close after only four months, on 31 December, in the midst of the holiday tourist season. It is the only show that has drawn a crowd to the PHM in recent years, as overall attendances have plummeted to levels not seen since the 1960s.

The plan is to close PHM Ultimo for at least three years, which should provide adequate opportunities to force out experienced staff and replace them with like-minded cronies. It will also save money that can be channelled into off-setting cost overruns on Parramatta.

To quote Lisa Havilah’s speech once more: “The rule is to never stop moving the project forward.” John Graham seems to have bought this line completely. The critics of the “renewal”, who have an abundance of expertise and experience, have been dutifully snubbed in favour of the glorious “vision” of a CEO who has killed attendances, treated the collection with contempt, and promoted an untested, ideologically-driven program that has every possibility of creating three bloated venues in Ultimo, Parramatta and Castle Hill, that are ruinous to maintain and of no special interest to the public. It’s a recipe for pouring millions of dollars down the drain in the pursuit of a fantasy of what a “radical” new museum should be....

Much of the Adelaide talk focussed on what a dynamic program there would be in Parramatta. The only problem is that the cuts and changes to the structure have left a shell with a ridiculously high-ceilinged exhibition space, apartments and dormitories, food and beverage facilities... but serious limitations in what the institution will be able to borrow and exhibit.

I can do no better than to quote former PHM curator, Kylie Winkworth: “No one has questioned why a project that was supposed to be a museum with a fully tanked underground car park turned into a commercially focussed entertainment and convention centre, with not a single dedicated exhibition space, no back of house space for collection or exhibition handling facilities, no separate loading dock for exhibitions and collections and not even one parking space for service and delivery vehicles.”

I could go on and on, as I’ve barely scraped the surface of this tragic saga. The single most alarming fact is that Minister Graham has said one thing and done the very opposite. He has bought into the destructive fantasy inaugurated by his predecessors and chosen to support a CEO who has boldly admitted her intention is to “unmake” the institution. He has allowed the culture of secrecy to fester and left the same shadowy people in place.’

McDonald also suggests:

'...The unwanted 'Powerhouse Parramatta' has had so much removed from the plan that it no longer fits international museum standards (quite aside from being located in a floodplain), so why not simply cut it loose from Powerhouse Ultimo? The former could be a venue for Hip Hop and similar events, the latter could remain an actual museum. While they're at it, they might like to make CEO Lisa Havilah the boss of whatever they choose to call Parramatta and hire someone for Ultimo who understands what a museum is and how it works.'

Read more: