

12 February 2024

Sydney Morning Herald

Powerhouse opacity invites only scepticism

Had the government simply done the planning properly and communicated it clearly, there would be no fuss and no fight ("Let's get behind the Powerhouse Museum vision", February 10).

We should not back the Powerhouse museum "restoration" when there is so little detail published about what is planned, when it is the same people in charge who let the museum run down, and wanted to see it all demolished and when all we know of the plans for the inside are that they will "reinstate the interior volumes of the heritage power station" and "flexible exhibition space". These sound like weasel words for "rip out everything built inside to make it a museum and leave it empty". Sensitive repairs and renovations could be done without emptying out the collection. Moving it will cause damage and decreases the chance much loved displays will ever return. The new "museum" in Parramatta can hardly be called such, more of an events and commercial venue than a real museum. We fear the Powerhouse is slated for the same fate. **Thomas Walder**, Cherrybrook

Your editorial urges us to "get behind the Powerhouse Museum's vision". What vision? The last plans the public saw involved the demolition of the award-winning Wran extension with a building erected on one of the few areas of public open space in Ultimo. We have had promises galore, but so far no assurances that the remaining fragile exhibits will be kept in place and protected while renovations take place; that, once renovated, it will be operated by professional museum curators as a Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences. No-one argues that the neglected structures need renovating, but those experts who ran the Powerhouse successfully over many years say it can be kept open and renovated in stages, as was the Australian Museum. If the number of people farewelling this beloved institution over the past couple of weekends is anything to go by, displays of Australia's early innovation and industry continue to be popular, as well as the latest in technology. Let's see the plans before closing the museum. **Elizabeth Elenius**, Pyrmont

Yes, the Powerhouse desperately needs some TLC but the images of the new refurbishment do not do justice to the iconic Sulman award-winning 1988 structures in their setting. The reduction in audience numbers has a lot to do with a singular focus on contemporary art installations and abandoning family and generalist audiences. The original government architect has offered a more economical approach to refurbishment to international best practice for museum environmental standards. Unfortunately, he continues to be ignored by a board that has no museological experts.

Judith Coombes, Lilyfield

