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## ‘It’s a travesty’: Art Gallery staff in walk out to protest job cuts



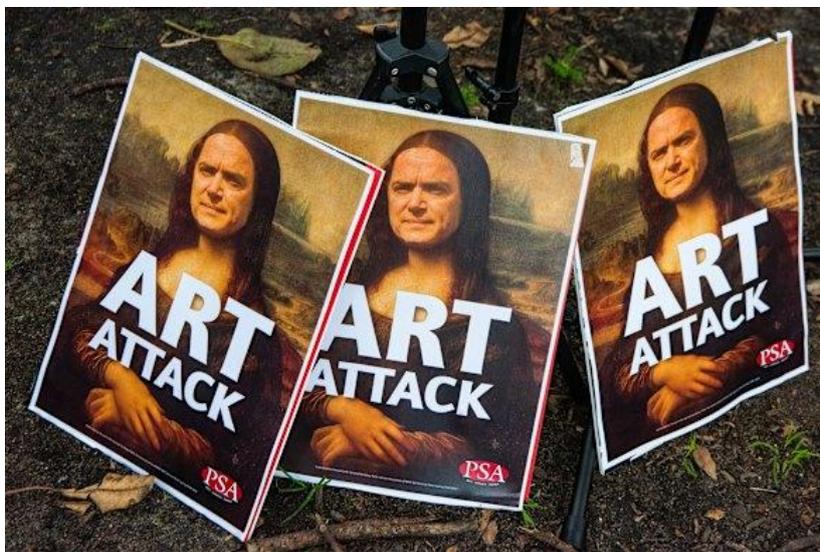
By [Linda Morris](#)

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Staff at the Art Gallery of NSW have walked out in protest at the axing of 51 jobs as budget figures reveal employee costs at the Powerhouse Museum are set to soar by 20 per cent at a time when the museum is mostly shut to the public.

Wednesday’s stop-work was the first industrial action at the gallery in 10 years or more and occurred after its director Maud Page [announced](#) a 10 per cent cut to the gallery’s 300-plus workforce in a restructure designed to save it \$7.5 million.



Posters at Wednesday’s protest bearing the face of Arts Minister John Graham as the Mona Lisa. *CREDIT: STEVEN SIEWERT*

About 100 employees and supporters rallied from midday on Wednesday outside the 154-year-old gallery under the banner of “Art Attack” with the face of Arts Minister John Graham superimposed on the Mona Lisa.

They aimed to draw public attention to the gallery's budget crisis ahead of budget estimates on Thursday, where the government's refusal to bail out the gallery will face parliamentary scrutiny.

The Public Service Association claims positions are on the line among the gallery's teams that safeguard, restore and care for irreplaceable artworks, and design and craft public displays.

At the same time, budget papers reveal the Minns government authorised a \$10 million increase to the [staff budget for 2025-26](#) at the Powerhouse Museum on top of the record \$50.2 million it spent the previous year.

The Powerhouse's projected [\\$60.6 million wages bill](#) eclipses that of other cultural institutions, including the State Library of NSW, which has been allocated \$39.2 million, Australian Museum (\$38.1 million), Museums of History (\$47.7 million) and even the Art Gallery of NSW (\$51 million). Yet the Powerhouse's Ultimo campus is shuttered, its headquarters at Parramatta is not scheduled to open until later next year and its Castle Hill storehouse is open to the public on weekends. Sydney Observatory is open four days a week for six hours a day. *The Herald* counted more than 50 positions advertised internally in the Powerhouse staff bulletin since January.

## EDITOR'S PICK



[Dozens of jobs to go as Art Gallery of NSW faces budget crisis](#)

Work on the museum's two major construction projects, worth more than \$1.2 billion, are managed and primarily staffed by Infrastructure NSW and construction giants Lendlease and Richard Crookes.

"The Powerhouse gets \$1 billion for a vanity rebuild in Parramatta despite its well documented issues," PSA's Anne Keneally told protesters. "The gallery gets punished after delivering record-breaking success. And what about the Archibald Prize, the jewel in the Crown? Will it tour the state or has that now become too expensive?"

The gallery's budget crisis is a major test of the new leadership of Page, named five months ago as the gallery's first female director. It also spotlights the Minns government's priorities to fund the [Powerhouse Museum's](#)

[expansion](#) ahead of the March 2027 state election while enforcing budget restraint on all other major cultural institutions.

The state funding agency, [Create NSW, is also being gutted](#), with the loss of 24 staff including three senior executives. The cuts to Create NSW amount to annual savings of about \$5 million, or \$20 million over the next four years, with only \$4 million of that announced for [western Sydney](#) as part of the government's three-year strategic plan.



Staff on the steps of the gallery. *CREDIT: STEVEN SIEWERT*

The Coalition's assistant art spokesperson, Jacqui Munro, told protesters: "We have to question whether this government is about to preside over an art gallery that opens four days a week because of these staff cuts. It's a travesty."

The Public Service Association, which represents staff at the gallery and the museum, has blamed the Powerhouse's runaway employee costs on management's push for consultants and external hires. Government says the extra staff funding is needed to build five major exhibitions for the Powerhouse Parramatta project. The gallery has extended the consultation period with staff by an additional two weeks. "This is a profoundly challenging time for the gallery," Page acknowledged, "especially for our dedicated colleagues who are impacted by the proposed structure."

Change was a normal part of any organisation's evolution, Graham said. "The Art Gallery is stable and focused, with a strong executive team committed to delivering its vision. I'm advised that the proposed organisational change reflects the Art Gallery's operational requirements, future programming and ambitions, its collections and audiences."