

8 July, 2026

THE "POWERHOUSE" IS "REWARDED FOR MISMANAGEMENT" BUT THE REST OF THE ARTS SECTOR IS "PUNISHED FOR SUCCESS"

SAVE THE POWERHOUSE is a community campaign to keep the Museum in Ultimo for Applied Arts & Sciences.

On their Facebook page on 8 July, 2026: <https://www.facebook.com/savethepowerhouse> **SAVE THE POWERHOUSE** summarised John McDonald's extensive newsletter report on the NSW arts budget, focusing on the future of the Powerhouse Museum.

They wrote:

'In his editorial of 29 June, distinguished arts critic John McDonald analyses the arts component of the 2026–27 NSW Budget, handed down by Treasurer Daniel Mookhey on 23 June.

Read "Bugling the Budget": <https://www.everythingthe.com/p/bugling-the-budget>.

"Glory, glory to the NSW Government! To those who have most, heaps shall be given. To those who have least, another cut is on the way.

This year's NSW State Budget reveals a government for whom the arts are no more than a means to an end: a short-sighted strategy for building electoral support in Sydney's western suburbs at the expense of most of the state's arts institutions, large and small," he writes.

McDonald continues: "It's assumed that history and heritage are of no interest to the bulk of the electorate, so one need not spend money supporting traditional museums and art galleries. These old things can be left to gather dust in a corner, assisted by a few wealthy donors who haven't kept up with the latest trends. The real funding priorities are lifestyle-and-event-generated: rave parties, festivals, rock or hip hop concerts, poetry slams, cooking classes, gardening, sport, sport and more sport. The most spectacular example may be Premier Minns' Trumpian affection for UFC cage fighting."

He also observes: "When it comes to the things the NSW Government truly loves, such as "Powerhouse Parramatta", festivals in the western suburbs, "Contemporary Music", or the night-time economy, there are no bounds to its largesse."

Note: In classical and academic contexts, "contemporary music" usually refers to serious arts music composed in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries although, in government policy and general usage, the term is often used much more broadly to encompass today's popular music and contemporary music industries.

McDonald's assessment is uncompromising: "It's a breathtaking display of arrogance that, in political terms, translates into a form of totalitarian behaviour in which the ruling party pays no attention to its critics or its victims, being ready to break promises at will, or to mislead Parliament and the press, as has consistently been the case with the Powerhouse."

Yet the Government's preference for popular entertainment over what has traditionally been regarded as "arts and culture", together with its emphasis on the night-time economy, is now confronting economic reality. As The Guardian reported on 30 June, "soaring production and touring costs, combined with cost-of-living pressures that are reducing ticket sales, have pushed parts of the musical theatre industry into crisis. In the space of a single week, two major productions - Waitress

and Beetlejuice - were forced to cancel performances, leaving hundreds of performers and crew without work."

Read "The show must go on: musical theatre cancellations lead to industry calls for urgent government help": <https://www.theguardian.com/.../musical-theatre...>

As a result, the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA), Australia's principal union and professional association for creative workers, is calling for government support through tax concessions and "government-funded vouchers of up to \$200 for theatre tickets."

This at a time when, as McDonald notes, "the \$1.21 billion expended on the "arts, culture and creative industries sector" represents a decline from last year's \$1.35 billion"—a reduction of around 10 per cent. Moreover, "the \$1.21 billion includes \$537 million (44 per cent—almost half) devoted to capital works and infrastructure." In his view, "most institutions must have realised that Daniel Mookhey, like the majority of his parliamentary colleagues, has zero interest in arts and culture, and pitched their claims at building projects."

While the overall arts budget is shrinking, predictably the Powerhouse is among the major beneficiaries, as McDonald writes: "Receiving a handy \$207 million over the next four years to help pay for the monumental act of vandalism called Powerhouse Ultimo, which the government prefers to call a 'revitalisation', a description that bears comparison with Putin's 'special military operation' in Ukraine...The Powerhouse is the fulcrum of all arts funding problems in NSW. Over the past decade it has absorbed a gargantuan amount of public money with very little to show for it."

He adds that even when Powerhouse Parramatta finally opens, "it will be a hungry beast that needs to keep sucking on the public teat because most of Ms Havilah's programs and policies have a high probability of being unsustainable. "McDonald argues that while the Powerhouse is "rewarded for mismanagement", the rest of the NSW arts sector is "punished for success".

- "The most successful and well-run regional galleries suffer huge cuts or have been defunded altogether."

- "For meekly submitting to budget cuts and making do with less, the AGNSW gets a further cut."

- "For bringing in audiences and working within budgets, the Australian Museum gets a cut."

- "...and let's not mention the Museum of Contemporary Art, which should rightfully be in intensive care by now."

McDonald concludes with a warning for the Government: "It would be ironic if the government became a victim of its own hubris for abandoning those people with an interest in the arts who habitually vote Labor, only to be invariably betrayed.

This time the betrayal has been so far-reaching it has the potential to mobilise a popular audience which knows nothing about art but has an absolute conviction that taxpayer dollars should not be spent on projects that claim to be all sweetness and light but give off a sickly whiff of corruption."

He also questions the Government's repeated claim that Powerhouse Parramatta will attract two million visitors in its first year..."which is pie in the sky. But even if it did achieve that feat, the numbers will plummet dramatically after everyone has paid a visit, while the running costs will keep clicking over like the meter on a distressingly long taxi ride.

Judging by the volume of propaganda we're already seeing in the Telegraph and elsewhere, we can be sure that Powerhouse Parramatta will be acclaimed as a massive success for the first three to six months—until reality bites."

And by then, the emperor minister and the empress CEO may discover that they have no clothes. ‘

