

Occasional Address

Royal Exhibition Building, Thursday 19th December 2019, 5.00pm.

Eda Ritchie AM FAICD

Doctor of Laws (honoris causa)

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Dean, Directors of the Victorian College of the Arts and the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, graduates, ladies and gentlemen. I thank the University, and the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music in particular, for the great honour they have done me in awarding me an honorary Doctorate of Laws – I value it incredibly highly.

It is also a great honour give this address, meeting in this elegant and historic World Heritage listed building, for the graduation of students from the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music in one of the world's leading Universities and Australia's No 1 University.

I sincerely congratulate you all on your great achievement in completing your degrees. It paves the way for you to move on with your lives equipped with priceless knowledge and skills - it paves the way for you to go on learning and sharing your opportunities and I acknowledge your families and friends who must be so proud of you today.

Whether you have studied music, art, dance, theatre or film, design or any other of the wonderful opportunities offered by your faculty; whether you are a creator or a performer - or both - you now have a higher plane from where to consider and to fulfil your life purpose and your dreams. You are part of a worldwide community of talented and committed artists and creators. Fine Arts and Music are our one true global language.

Maybe you will teach and maybe you will tell your stories through your creativity and your performances and express your feelings about the world we live in.

And people will listen. Who could not be moved by the messages coming from the current exhibition at National Gallery of Victoria : *Civilization: The Way We Live Now* is an international photography exhibition of monumental scale. The exhibition looks at the phenomenal complexity of life in the twenty-first century and reflects on the ways in which photographers have documented, and held a mirror up, to the world around us – putting a spotlight on the big issues such as environmental degradation, global warming and diminishing resources, It is unsettling. It makes you think.

Who could not be moved by the inspiring and beautiful oratorio of Deborah Cheetham which was performed in Hamer Hall in June. “Eumeralla, a War Requiem for Peace” whose message to us all is learn, understand and reflect on what happened in the Frontier Wars between colonists and the indigenous community they decimated. But in that learning is a message of hope that in knowledge comes understanding, and a path towards reconciliation.

Many of you will be familiar with Tom Roberts' painting known as the Big Picture. Tom Roberts – a famous alumni of the NGV Art School before it joined the VCA - It is a massive work about 5 x 3 metres showing the Opening of the First Australian parliament in this grand building where we are today. It depicts the Duke of Cornwall and York – later George V - surrounded by all members of that first parliament – 269 individually painted portraits- and an impression of the 12,000 guests who were there for the event. I recently looked at this huge work and was struck by a thought – this painting was telling me what a momentous day it was – a hugely important and proud day when Australia began governing itself as one

– no longer a collection of colonies and territories. Australia was truly born that day. It was the 14th May 1901. The 14th May. This is the day we should celebrate Australia Day!

The arts world offers you an extraordinary opportunity to take up the responsibility we all have to work towards a better world through the way we live our own lives, and through the international language of music and the performing and visual arts. Draw attention to the wrongs but celebrate the wonderful and the beautiful and the funny and the kind, and most importantly, find and give hope. There so much ahead for you to explore. I wish you courage, good health and good luck!

Citation for Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*

Eda Ritchie AM has enjoyed a distinguished career with a strong record of commitment to the arts, education, government, health and the environment over a period of almost five decades. In 2010 her contributions to the community were recognised with an appointment as a Member in the Order of Australia.

Eda received an Associate in Music diploma at Clyde School in Woodend and later a Graduate Diploma of Business (Agribusiness) at Monash University. She conducted a career in farming and business, also working in natural resource management and coastal strategic planning, while giving tirelessly through philanthropic activities. From 1997 to 2018 she was a Trustee of the Ross Trust, including Chair for five annual rotations. Since 1970 the Trust has championed biodiversity conservation and educational equity for children from disadvantaged backgrounds in Victoria.

Eda has a long history of engagement with the University. She has been Chair of the Victorian College of the Arts Foundation since 2011 and a member of the University's Foundation and Trusts Committee since 2018. She was a member of University Council from 2004 to 2014. She has also been a Director of the Ian Potter Museum of Art (2005 – 2014), a Director of Melbourne University Publishing (2006 – 2013) and a Director of the Howard Florey Institute (1993 – 2000).

Eda has shown a strong commitment to her local community and to improving the lives of regional Victorians generally. She was the founding Chair of the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival for the decade from 1990, the inaugural Chair of Rural Ambulance Victoria (1999 – 2002); Chair of the Western Coastal Board (1996 – 2000); State President of the Victorian Liberal party (1984 – 1987); Chair of Commissioners Moyne Shire Council and a board member of Moyne Health Services, the Rural Finance Corporation, Trust for Nature, and the Wool and Rural Industries Skills Training Institute. She was instrumental in the establishment of Marine National Parks and regional protected areas through membership of the Environment Conservation Council and the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council. She was a member of the Australian National Maritime Museum board (2002 – 2007) and she has been a Board member of the Melbourne Recital Centre since 2014.

*Ms Ritchie is nominated for the Doctor of Laws (*honoris causa*) in recognition of her long history of distinguished public service in several sectors, and particularly for her contributions to the arts at the University, in Melbourne and in rural Victoria.*