

Thank you Deputy Chancellor, thank you Lorraine Ling and most importantly thank all of you who are graduating – it is for your efforts and future that we are here today.

Graduating is the bitter/sweet transition of two of life's great journey's – the completion of a tertiary degree, and the beginning of a future built upon it.

What will that future be? *Where* will that future be?

Australia's diverse and beautiful cities, landscapes, cultures are a factor of its history, the people who chose to live here and how they chose to live.

Sadly Australia's relative economic strength is largely a factor of a resources boom – crudely speaking, we live in a quarry.

This quarry brings the trappings of wealth, but it has also made us lazy. Our culture and the policies of our elected officials tend not value and encourage complexity, invention, innovation, entrepreneurship, the fine arts, philanthropy and social responsibility to the extent that they should.

“Why should they?”, I hear you ask. During the second world war the Prime Minister of the U.K., Sir Winston Churchill faced great pressure to disband the budget for the arts to fund the war effort.

He refused saying: “well what are we fighting for anyway?” He understood that the measure of a people lies in its cultural production, its social responsibility, its ability to educate itself and to build from these its energy, its ingenuity and its wealth.

I would like to argue here today for an Australia who's strength is built upon the intelligence wisdom and ingenuity of its people.

I take *this* opportunity to make this argument because you who are graduating here today embody the potential to make thisx so.

There are of course amazing artworks, ideas, discoveries, inventions and applied research evolving in our secondary and tertiary institutions every day.

In spite of the slow whittling back of a policy that once empowered every person by giving them free access to education we still have great educational institutions.

But what are we *doing* with this education, this knowledge, this creativity?

A large portion of those I graduated from architecture with no longer live in Australia. Drawn by a desire to live in culturally rich places or to study and contribute to the academic circuits of the United States, Europe or to make their fortunes in the Middle East and Asia, the moment they'd saved an air fare – they left.

I miss them, and my own industry and Australia's built environment is poorer for their absence. The irony of this is that, had they stayed and built their careers here, this place would be more like the place they'd wished it was.

More importantly, having played a role in transforming it they would have now have great agency in the world, in *their* world.

Sadly this phenomenon, often referred to as 'brain drain', affects the fine arts, the sciences, business and economics, industry, manufacturing, social sciences, law and so on.

This saddens me because of the message it sends: 'if you want to be the best, you have to leave'. It also saddens me because it is so *easy* to fix – all that is required is a subtle shift in attitude.

I put it to you that to live in a great city is one thing, to *make* a city great is another all together.

I put it to you that to study in the worlds finest institutions is one thing, but to *transform* your own institution *into* one of the worlds finest by the virtue of your own work is another altogether.

I put it to you that to join a community of great artists is one thing, to build your own is another altogether.

This phenomenon 'brain drain' and the sense that the best things *must* be elsewhere are evident also within Australia and are critical issues for any city that is not Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney or Perth.

So what of the future of Mildura? I don't need to tell you that Mildura has a history of great ambition.

Evidence lies in the wide boulevards and palm avenue's laid out by those Canadians boys that Alfred Deakin dragged out here. It lies in the architecture of the Methodist Church, the Old Mildura Base Hospital and Rio Vista.

It lies in the now strained system of 21 locks and weirs that run all the way to river mouth in South Australia.

Now that the weirs are out of the water I cannot help but marvel at their sheer industrial beauty and imagine the weight of the kilometres of water pushing against their boards.

Mildura's present ambitions, all *built* on a histories, are evident in its social programs, its growing medical industry, its dexterous reaching for solar energy investment and innovation, its regional education institutions and the quantity and quality of its arts festivals – the origins of which are important to re-tell in the context of this argument I'm putting to you.

Attending the last Palimpsest I learned the story of the first Mildura Sculpture Triennial as told by its curator Tom McCullough. The first Triennial took place before the existence of the Australian Council for the Arts. Tom invented the festival on the back of an envelope and funded it on the smell of an oily rag.

He cajoled the artists to fund all their own travel, accommodation and to install and donate their work and, in spite of a famously amusing accidents where the artist Tim Burns blew his own foot off while installing a sculpture made of explosives, the show was a popularly and critically well received.

Shortly after this the then Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam presented to the Australian Cabinet a case for establishing an Australian Council for the Arts.

In question time, he deflected the question: “But *what on earth* would such a thing fund Mr Whitlam?” by pointing to the Mildura Sculpture Triennial and saying “That” - and the Australia Council was born.

Tom McCullough and Gough Whittlam both knew, that to change the world, you always ask for forgiveness not for permission. Act first, then ask for approval – you will always get it.

Mildura's indigenous histories and its more recent colonial and commonwealth ones are littered with such histories, but great histories are nothing without a future built upon them – and *you* are that future.

So I put to you the importance of making your own rich, complex and diverse cultures and economies.

Rather than search of those that already exist, better to make your own.

The best possible future available to you as you move through this euphoric portal of graduation, is to approach *your* world, here in Mildura, with great awareness of what this place is, for it is your medium, it is your pallet, it is your resource.

I encourage you not leave this place. I invite you to find ambition in your core and use it to make this place what you wish it to be. Do not ask for permission simply act, and the world will come to you.