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Artworld
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Role Reversal



A collection of portraits featuring well-known media personalities aims to challenge preconceptions about the media in this country and reveal glimpses into the personalities and lives of our news purveyors

The use of the term Fourth Estate in relation to the media dates back to the 18th century when King Louis XVI of France held a full meeting of Les Etats-Generaux (The General Estates) at Versailles.

The First Etat or Estate consisted of 300 clergymen; the second was made up of 300 noblemen and the third of 600 commoners.

Some years later British statesman, orator and political theorist, Edmund Burke, glanced up at the House of Commons' Press Gallery and remarked: 'Yonder sits the Fourth Estate – and they are more important of them all'.

That comment became part of our language, and the term 'fourth estate' has since then been associated with the press, and later also with the electronic media.

A new exhibition of portraits of leading Australian media personalities has, therefore, been titled *The Fourth Estate*.

The idea for the exhibition was hatched by the recently retired editor-in-chief of *The Gold Coast Bulletin* Bob Gordon, with lawyers and gallery owners Chris Nyst and Jason Murakami.

"Chris, Bob and I were interested in the notion that portraits and the press have a unique relationship in Australian history," says Jason Murakami, who was a Gold Coast journalist before he returned to studies to undertake a law degree.

Portraiture and the media have a long history in Australia. An obvious example is that of J.F. Archibald, who bequeathed money in his will to the then National Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1921 (two years after his death) for Australia's most popular art award. The Archibald Prize.



Archibald was the editor of *The Bulletin* magazine – not to be confused with *The Gold Coast Bulletin* – which was a powerful political voice of the time.

Archibald generously used art in the publication, and once commissioned artist John Longstaff to paint a portrait of poet/writer Henry Lawson.

So pleased was he with the portrait he willed a considerable sum to later establish a portrait prize.

The Fourth Estate exhibition, therefore, is designed as a comment on the power of contemporary press, radio and television in this country, through the medium of portraiture.

It aims to challenge preconceptions about the media, and give revealing glimpses of the personal and private domains of our news purveyors.

“There’s sort of a delicious sense of irony in seeing the big hitters of the fourth estate exposed to the public spotlight,” says Nyst.

The collection subtitle is: *From talking heads to painted heads* and curator Lorraine Pilgrim describes the show ‘as truly collaborative – not a case of taking a likeness from a photo but of real interaction between the artist and subject’.



Artists include Rod Bunter, Nick Batchelor, Mari Hirata, Kirsten Reed, Sally Harrison, Rebecca Stonehouse, Kathy Macaky, Deb Mostert, Lisa Lee, Emma Theyers, Simon Roots, Clayton Tremlett, Shayle Flessler, Llewellyn Skye, Anthony Lister, Mel Simpson, Susan O'Doherty, Donna Malone, Magnus Kenndy, David Smith, Wayde Owen, Simon Mee and Cal Mackinnon. Media personality portraits include those of George Negus, Lee Lin Chin, Madonna King, Bob Gordon, Dean Gould, Margaret Pomeranz, David Stratton, Peter Gleeson, Matthew Condon, Greg Stolz, Chloe Maxwell, Rod Young, Kerry O'Brien, Jonathan Holmes, Fenella Kernebone, Liz Porter, Alan Armsden, Mungo MacCallum, Bill Leak, Phil Jarrett, Greg Shackleton and Marieke Hardy.

The exhibition, opening on Friday, is the second themed politico-art show mounted by the gallery. Earlier this year it presented the thought-provoking *Innocence? Capturing the Wrongfully*

Convicted exhibition, which has since been invited to the World Innocence Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 2011.

“Our shared vision is supporting visual art, nurturing pictorial story tellers and fostering the creation of bold ideas,” says Murakami. ■