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Sunday, 14 August 2011

Australia Council for the Arts  
372 Elizabeth Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010

## **Australian Pavilion, Venice Biennale**

Dear Mr. James Strong, Chairman of the Australia Council for the Arts,  
Ms. Kathy Keele, Chief Executive Officer of the Australia Council for the Arts; and  
Mr. Simon Crean, Minister for the Arts,

I join many concerned voices from the art & architectural community and call on the Australia Council for the Arts to procure the new Australian Pavilion for art and architecture through an open architectural competition.

Venice Biennale is universally seen as the most important and prestigious event on the international visual arts calendar. Every two years Venice becomes the world stage with the attention of the world's visual arts community and media focused on Venice over a six-month period. Equally, on alternating years, Venice Biennale hosts the most important and prestigious event on the international architecture calendar. The world's architecture community come together with attendance reaching 170,801 visitors in the most recent Architecture Biennale. In addition, given the pavilion itself is inherently architectural, plans to build a new pavilion is as much about presenting architecture to the world as art.

Australia is one of thirty nations that has the privilege of a permanent pavilion in this international setting. This is an extraordinary opportunity to present the very best that the nation has to offer.

If this is the aim, then the procurement process for the new Australian Pavilion should set out to do so.

I understand that the current proposal is to select from architects that have "previous experience designing public art space and experience delivering projects internationally". This may seem to be a reasonable approach but much evidence suggests otherwise.

When one surveys the architectural landscape, it has often been the 'untested' architects that make exceptional moments in architecture. In Australia, consider Utzon and the Sydney Opera House, Harry Seidler and Australia Square, LAB and Melbourne's Federation Square. Internationally, consider Renzo Piano with Richard Rogers and the Pompidou Centre, Jean Nouvel and the Arab World Institute, Norman Foster and the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank. In the art space, consider Frank Lloyd Wright and the Guggenheim New York, Gae Aulenti and the Musée d'Orsay, Peter Zumthor and the Kunsthaus Bregenz, Roy Grounds and the National Gallery of Victoria. They all had limited experience in the project type or scale prior to these projects. These ground breaking projects had tremendous impact on their respective cities, providing lasting cultural and economic value.

Big leaps in innovation often come from emerging practices because they naturally approach projects with a fresh set of eyes. Those early years honing their skills, research and teaching, combined with passion and hunger for new opportunities are a potent recipe for exceptional outcomes.

I urge you to consider an open procurement process.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Choi', with a stylized, cursive script.

JOHN CHOI  
Director  
Adjunct Professor of Architecture, University of Sydney