

Mr. James Strong AO
Chairman
Australia Council for the Arts
372 Elizabeth Street (cnr Cooper Street)
Surry Hills N.S.W. 2012

Rinaldo Di Stasio
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Dear James

I was delighted by the announcement last week that the Australia Council has decided to progress the replacement of Australia's temporary pavilion at the Venice Biennale. As you may be aware, it has long been a passion of mine to see the temporary pavilion replaced by something more commensurate with the standards of excellence established by the Australian arts community, and which is both an outstanding example of architectural form and an ideal space for the display of art and architecture.

I note that it has been reported in the press that a new pavilion design will be chosen "by invitation" from a small "hand-selected" group of Australian architects. I note also that the Australia Council's press release suggested that:

- the Council's initial estimates indicate that the likely cost of a new pavilion would be in the range of \$4 million to \$6 million; and
- the development costs are to be raised from a private sector fundraising program.

As you may also be aware, a substantial amount of work has been done by many talented people, via the Di Stasio Ideas Competition, in generating proposals for the design of a rebuilt Australian Pavilion. Over 170 formal submissions, from in excess of 400 registrations, were received from architects in 50 countries. The Judges – a distinguished panel comprising John Gollings, Norman Day, Bill Henson, Callum Morton and Bridget Smyth – were delighted and, frankly, astounded by the quality of the submissions to that competition, which were captured in the *Venice Biennale New Australian Pavilion* volume published in September 2008. A copy of that volume is enclosed with this letter. They were particularly impressed by the design submitted by the winner of the competition, Davide Marchetti.

An installation exhibition at Heide followed, which was attended by record numbers of patrons. The exhibition included a formal presentation and discourse of the submitted entries, which was again attended by a significant representation of the architectural and art communities.

Since the announcement of Davide Marchetti as competition winner, a feasibility study has been undertaken by a leading firm in Italy. As expected, that study confirmed the feasibility of Marchetti's design. However, the study also confirmed that the cost of replacing the Australian pavilion would, on any view, be substantially in excess of the \$4-6 million posited in the Australia Council release.

A number of prominent Australians, including in particular Janet Holmes-à-Court and Norman Day, support me in the pursuit of bringing the construction of the new Australian Pavilion to fruition. In light of the likely cost of replacing the Australian pavilion and the limitations inherent in raising funds for that purpose largely or wholly from the private sector, it seems to me that the most natural and sensible approach would be to make use of the substantial work which has already been done, via the Di Stasio Ideas Competition, in sourcing fully-fledged designs for the new pavilion. As the progenitor of that competition, I would welcome the Australia Council using the outstanding fruits of that exercise as, at least, a starting point for consideration of the design of the replacement building.

There has been some discussion by some stakeholders, reported in the press, to the effect that the external design of the new pavilion is relatively unimportant. We disagree. The Venice Biennale is an *architectural exhibition*. The Australia Council has the opportunity and the duty to replace the existing temporary pavilion with a permanent version that is both an outstanding example of the architect's craft *and* an optimum art and architectural exhibition space. Moreover, the Biennale's authorities simply will not accept any replacement pavilion unless it is of the highest architectural merit, of a comparable standard to the 29 other world-class pavilions in the Giardini.

The Di Stasio Ideas Competition has generated a substantial groundswell of support from the architectural and arts communities, and interested individuals from the broader private sector, for replacement of the Australian pavilion. The Australia Council's release has further stimulated interest in the project, with the architecture community in particular concerned that the process for selection should result in the best possible replacement for a temporary pavilion that has now been in place for over two decades. I am confident that an efficient and properly targeted fundraising effort – inclusory of both the architectural and arts communities, as well as the interested private sector – could generate far in excess of the \$4-6 million which presently appears to be the Australia Council's working cost estimate.

At the 2010 Venice Architecture Biennale, the Australian pavilion attracted record numbers of attendees. One of world's preeminent architects, Lord Norman Foster, hailed the Australian exhibition as "fantastic – in fact outstanding." Australia has an opportunity, through the construction of an outstanding new pavilion to showcase the best of Australian art and architecture on an enduring basis, to build on and exceed these plaudits.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how best we might utilise and share with you the very considerable work generated as a result of the Di Stasio Ideas Competition for the design of the new pavilion.

Yours sincerely

Rinaldo Di Stasio