

CULTURAL LANDMARK

Plans to build the National Indigenous Art Gallery are under way.

It will be built at a most appropriate site in Australia – Alice Springs.

The gallery will be the centrepiece of the NT Government's commitment to a \$100 million National Art Trail.

An eight-strong steering committee of experts – headed by curator, writer and consultant Hetti Perkins and Desart chief executive Philip Watkins – has been set up to make the project happen.

Ms Perkins says committee members appreciate the significance for all Australians of building the gallery and the responsibility of the task before them.

She says the final report – which is expected to recommend where the gallery should be sited and the breadth of work it should house – will be drawn up only after “comprehensive consultation” with local and national stakeholders, and that the cultural aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are central to its charter.

“The art gallery will be an international cultural landmark to celebrate the rich cultural heritage and contemporary artistic expressions of Indigenous people from across Australia,” she says.

Several potential sites for the art museum have been noted; Ms Perkins and Mr Watkins say all of them have their “pros and cons”.

They say the foremost consideration when recommending a place for the gallery will be respecting Arrernte protocols around significant cultural sites.

The committee is also “keenly aware” of the need to allow space for future expansion as this is a challenge many major cultural institutions face in Australia.

And the beauty of the landscape of Central Australia – a major drawcard for visitors to Alice Springs and an inspiration for artists – will be taken into account.

The design of the gallery – which will have cultural, environmental and practical considerations – will probably follow an architectural competition, which would be sure to attract interest from architects around the world.

The gallery is expected to house all forms of Indigenous art, ancient and modern.

“Australia is home to the world’s oldest continuous cultural tradition and the contemporary artistic expressions of our people, in a myriad of forms, are renowned internationally,” says Ms Perkins.

“The art museum will have the capacity to celebrate the artistic diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and recognise that the Northern Territory is home to artists who have transformed Australia’s cultural landscape.”

The gallery is expected to become a standalone destination.

“We know that tourists want to experience what makes our country unique in the world,” says Mr Watkins.

“Already Alice Springs is a drawcard for tourists wanting a first-hand experience of the culture and country that inspires our artists.

“An art museum – working in collaboration with outstanding local cultural institutions and that places the extraordinary art of this region within the Territory and wider national context – will be a highlight for tourists.”

Ms Perkins and Mr Watkins say that a dedicated art museum for all Australians to celebrate and share the venerated traditional and contemporary cultural expressions of Indigenous people is “long overdue”.

“Given the internationally distinguished reputation of our cultural leaders – both past and present – it is not only the right thing to do, it is the obvious thing to do.”

TQ

“AN ART MUSEUM – WORKING IN COLLABORATION WITH OUTSTANDING LOCAL CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AND THAT PLACES THE EXTRAORDINARY ART OF THIS REGION WITHIN THE TERRITORY AND WIDER NATIONAL CONTEXT – WILL BE A HIGHLIGHT FOR TOURISTS.”



HETTI PERKINS AND PHILIP WATKINS ...
HEADING THE STEERING COMMITTEE



INDIGENOUS ARTISTS AT DESART IN ALICE SPRINGS (FROM LEFT)
JUDITH PUNGKARTA INKAMALA, RONA PANANGKA RUBUNTJA,
HAYLEY PANANGKA COULTHARD, ANITA MBITJANA RATARA,
DAWN NGALA WHEELER AND RAHEL KNGWARRIA UNGWANAKA

AN INDIGENOUS ART EXHIBITION AT DESART

