

ADDRESS BY SIR WILLIAM DEANE
GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE UNVEILING OF THE HELLENIC TRIBUTE ART PIECE
"DISCOBOLUS" AT STOCKROUTE PARK
HOMEBUSH BAY - SYDNEY
SUNDAY, 13 AUGUST 2000

This sculpture - "Discobolus" - is a visionary one. It evokes the spirit and the history of the Olympics, taking us all the way back to Ancient Olympia from which the sculpture's great disc - symbolically representing the ancient discus of Castor and the modern CD ROM - was conceptually flung. It is a Hellenic tribute to all the Olympians of Sydney 2000. And it eloquently symbolises the unique bond between Australia and Ancient and Modern Greece. I warmly congratulate the Sculptor, Robert Owen, on both the concept and the execution of a truly wonderful work.

The unveiling of Discobolus on this site at Homebush reminds us, of course, of the imminence of the Games. Sydney is now well prepared. The Stadium stands ready to welcome the huge crowds of athletes, officials, dignitaries, performers and others who will be attending the Opening Ceremony only a month and two days away. The first athletes - and even a few horses - from overseas have arrived. The Sydney 2000 Olympics Art Festival commences this week. And the Olympic Flame, which I was privileged to see carried from the Stadium at Ancient Olympia three months ago, has now journeyed through Greece itself, through the Olympic countries of Oceania and through most of Australia and will tomorrow for the first time enter New South Wales.

It is, of course, understandable that most of the excitement of the Olympics is focused upon sporting aspects of the Games. But the Olympics have never been concerned only with sport. From their inception, the Games have represented excellence, not only in the sporting arena, but also in a broad range of cultural endeavours. That being so, an essential aspect of the Sydney Olympics is the celebration of our national art and culture and the creation of a lasting cultural legacy. This great sculpture by the acclaimed Melbourne sculptor, Robert Owen, is an important part of that celebration and legacy. It will not only enrich this Olympic precinct in Australia's oldest and largest city. It will also, as I have said, remind us of the unique bonds that join Ancient and Modern Greece with Australia. Those bonds include the immense contribution which the culture of Greece and its people have made to western civilisation on this, as much as the other, side of the world.

They also include the extraordinary links forged during the short, doomed Greek and Crete campaigns of World War II when the people of Greece risked ruthless reprisals to shelter and care for hundreds of our young Australian soldiers and to assist them in their attempts to escape. There are, in Greece today, no less than 606 graves of Australian soldiers who died there in two World Wars so far away from their families and their homeland. A further 329 who have no known graves are commemorated on Memorials. Last May, as the first Governor-General of this country to pay an official visit to Greece, I honoured and mourned them all as my wife and I placed a wreath at Phaleron Cemetery where 252 lie buried. I also, on behalf of the Australian people, paid tribute to Greece's war heroes at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the heart of Athens.

And of course, perhaps most important of all, there are the rich and strong bonds of kinship, of friendship and of personal achievement represented by our Australian nationals who claim Greek origins. In Australia today, there are over 140,000 people who were actually born in Greece. When you take into account the families and descendants of those who have come to this land from Greece, we have a Greek Australian community of some 700,000 people. That means that Australia is the second largest star in the Greek Diaspora, coming only after the United States. The positioning of this sculpture with its olive grove and cypress trees among our gum trees represents perfectly the way that our Greek community has become an integral and enriching part of our broader multicultural Australian community.

At a practical level, Discobolus is an enduring gift by our Hellenic community to the Australian nation. On behalf of all Australians, I sincerely thank that community for its great generosity in raising the more than one half million dollars necessary to complete the project.

I again congratulate Robert Owen on an inspiring work of art and all those individuals whose generosity and efforts have made this moment possible. Apart from members of the Hellenic community, I should single out for special mention the Olympic Co-ordination Authority and its staff, the members of the Public Art Team and the members of the Public Art Advisory Committee. And now, with great pleasure, I will cut the ribbon to officially unveil Discobolus the Hellenic Tribute to the Year 2000 Olympians.