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**Title:**

Opening address to the Master Painters, Decorators and Signwriters Convention

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OPENING ADDRESS TO THE MASTER PAINTERS, DECORATORS AND SIGNWRITERS CONVENTION, BY THE PREMIER, DON DUNSTAN. 22.3.76

My Lord Mayor, Mr. Gillard, Mr. Jacobs, Mr. Flehr, Mr. Foggo, ladies and gentlemen :

Thanks very much for asking me to speak at your convention, and, of course, thank you for holding in in Adelaide. I don't think you could have chosen a better time to sample the attractions of Adelaide and the surrounding areas. The city has involved itself with the Festival of Arts and the wide range of other attractions which coincide with the Festival, and the people of Adelaide are very actively involved in making the Festival an event for the whole community.

I hope one area of that public involvement, the very attractive Festival banners which are hanging in the city streets and which were made by many community groups as part of their Festival activities - hasn't caused your industry too much distress. I think everyone would agree that they are a colourful way of joining in.

The work of your industry is one of the most visible features of modern society. Don't think I am speaking disparagingly when I say that you have a power over the cityscape quite disproportionate to your industry's size, but the fact is that, in general, a person's first impression of a city or town is greatly influenced by the advertising hoardings or through the overall impact of the colouring of the buildings. Often that impression is favourable, and we could all name cities and towns both in Australia and overseas that are a delight to visit because of their charm and appeal.

Unfortunately, there are places which are not as pleasant to arrive at.

With the pressures of urbanisation and industrialisation, the preconditions for those negative places will occur more frequently. If we are to make our cities and towns liveable, those pressures have to be resisted.

Your industry is unique in the importance it will have in that task, because the measure of your success is how you can create an atmosphere which passers-by appreciate and approve of, without making the material components of that atmosphere obtrusive or jarring.

The relationship between our visual environment and man's efforts is a very important and delicate one. My Government is very concerned with all aspects of the environment, and we have enacted comprehensive legislation to cover pollution of the air, pollution of our waterways and we are currently drafting a new law to deal with noise pollution.

One area which we have been most concerned about, but which is possible the most fraught with difficulty is the visual environment. There are

severe practical problems in dealing with visual pollution that has been in existence for many years and which cannot be reversed without very substantial compensation to individuals or companies. As well, there has to be consideration that industries which are necessary or desirable for economic development will, in some cases, disturb the visual environment. The question then turns on whether the industry can minimise its effects.

These are, as I said, practical difficulties which industrialised societies must face and elected authorities deal with. In South Australia, the Government has strongly defended the environment and has sought to encourage other governmental and private organisations to do the same.

In the area of the visual environment, we have consistently followed the course that whatever is done in South Australia should enhance the environment.

And that is where the general environment debate takes a new twist, because implicit in that aim of enhancing the visual amenity is an aesthetic judgement. When we look at a badly polluted bay with oil slicks, rotting fish and dying vegetation, almost everyone would agree that such a state of affairs was wrong and that it was pollution. Similarly, a chimney stack pouring acrid smoke into the air is clearly seen by most people as polluting our environment.

The same definitive judgements cannot be made so easily regarding the visual environment, particularly in the area which most concerns your industry, outdoor advertising.

But there is a great deal of common ground which enables us to work out some important principles regarding the effect of advertising material outdoors on the community we live in, and look at, each day.

We only have to look overseas for examples of what we should try to avoid. Ogden Nash wrote many fine verses, but one of his most memorable was the couplet which started with the wistful line

"I doubt that I shall ever see a  
billboard as lovely as a tree"...

And it was wistful at the time he wrote it, for America in the 1950s and 1960s was in danger of obliterating its environment with advertising hoardings of all descriptions.

The reaction which eventually developed against those excesses led to the prevention of further widespread abuses of the landscape and allowed a little of the past to be undone. But by that time the reaction was sufficiently widespread. America had become a land in which many areas of the countryside could only be seen but briefly through gaps in a plethora

of signs which produced a blurred image telling people to buy something, sell something or eat something.

Fortunately Australia never reached that stage. We were able to learn the lesson, if we wanted to. And in South Australia we certainly want to preserve the attractive and distinctive landscape of our State.

That concern does not preclude outdoor advertising: rather it means that advertising must be well designed, and planned with a mind to its effects on the visual amenity of the community.

Good commercial design is attractive, although here again we are moving into that tricky field of aesthetics. In trying to make South Australia the Design State of Australia, the Government has done much to encourage good commercial design in a number of industries, including your own. I hope that cooperation and sympathy of interest can continue and expand so that the benefits of good design are put before us in the advertising we see each day.

Good design and high standards provide your industry with the way to present outdoor advertising to the public in a manner which enhances the environment rather than clashes with it. We are all aware of signs around us that are totally incongruous and designed to scandalise the environment rather than work in partnership, but I am sure that the industry and the community at large are now looking for quality in advertising design rather than just shock value .

Those expectations will change from area to area as the local environment alters. The charm of Rundle Street is added to by the rather haphazard multiplicity of signs both large and small and the overall impression is a pleasingly vibrant commercialism. Other cities around the world have commercial areas which are garish, but still attractive. The more memorable ones such as Paris and Rome, have a small dash of exuberant advertising amid a generally restrained cityscape - and that is the effect I believe Adelaide should generate.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to be as complimentary about the juxtaposition of advertising which mars the visual environment of some of the trunk roads of Australian cities, or Paramatta Road in Sydney is not an attractive experience and I am sure most people don't read the jumble of signs that confront them. Such a mass of disjointed shouting eventually merges into a blur for most people, and so neither the advertiser's interests or the community's interests are met by such a blight.

Areas such as those are particularly regrettable to us in Adelaide, because in the city centre we have many good examples of outdoor advertising which

is effective and harmonious. We are in a position to encourage design which is sympathetic to the city face because the City of Adelaide Development Committee has clear powers over outdoor advertising and takes an active interest in the question, in great contrast to the majority of local government bodies who seem quite uninterested in the visual environment of the areas they administer.

Local Government needs to take greater interest in its responsibilities to the community to ensure that the visual environment is improved.

Outdoor advertising is a vital part of our commercial processes, and it can be just as imaginative and sensitive as advertising in any other media.

Certainly, if we look back to the traditional forms of advertising in England, Europe and Asia, outdoor advertising has a cultural heritage which far predates any other form.

But just as the shields swinging above the doors of the old English pubs and the cloth banners outside the tea-houses of Japan were an accepted, tasteful and functional part of the environment of the time, so we should aim for our outdoor advertising to blend in harmoniously with our lifestyle.

My Government is anxious to work with your industry and local government to achieve this and I am sure that from both a commercial and professional standpoint, the advertising industry has as much to gain as the community at large from environmentally complementary outdoor advertising.

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