

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS  
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

**Group: Written**

**Program: 2.1**

**Question: BE14/072**

**Senator Singh asked the following question at the hearing on 26-29 May 2014:**

1. Report Australian Monday 26 May 2014
2. Noting that Artbank's aims are "Supporting and promoting Australian contemporary art through the collecting, commissioning, curating and leasing of art", does the Ministry consider the Artbank collection to be an important part of Australia's national art collection?
3. Is the report correct that 8 or 9 valuable paintings have been sold by Artbank over the past month or so?
4. For the record, what were those paintings?
5. What was the reason for the sale?
6. How much money was paid to the Commonwealth (that is, minus buyer's premium or other commissions paid to agents)?
7. How much were the buyer's premiums and any other commissions?
8. Who were the agents chosen to handle the sales? How were the agents or auction houses chosen to handle the sales?
9. Why was the provenance of the paintings described as "Institution, Sydney?" Was the Ministry trying to conceal that Artbank was selling valuable pictures?
10. What was the price paid for each painting?
11. Were the paintings valued or assessed in any way by the National Gallery of Australia? Were they considered for acquisition by the National Gallery of Australia? If not, why not?
12. Were the paintings offered for sale or gift to the National Gallery of Australia?
13. Where have the proceeds of the sale been paid? To whose account? Artbank's? If not, why not?
14. A functioning website is crucial for a commercial operation like Artbank. Artbank's website has not been functioning for some months. What is the reason for that? What resources are being devoted to fixing the website? When will the website be functioning?

**The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:**

2. Yes. Artbank has 10,000 works of contemporary Australian Indigenous and non-Indigenous art. The objectives of the program are to encourage the development of Australian contemporary art through the acquisition of the work of living Australian artists; and to promote the value of Australian contemporary art to the broader community by making this art accessible through an art leasing scheme.
3. Ten paintings were sold.
4. Jeffrey SMART *Cap d'Antibes* 1965  
Jeffrey SMART *On the Cassia* 1965  
Sam FULLBROOK *Roses* c.1970s  
Margaret OLLEY *Newcastle Harbour* c.1975  
Margaret OLLEY *Marigolds and Prickly Pears* c.1978  
Margaret OLLEY *Morning Brioche* 1982  
William ROBINSON *Untitled* c.1980  
William ROBINSON *Grassy Painting with William and Shirley looking at a Regency Bower Bird* 1985  
John COBURN *The Tower* 1963  
John BRACK *Confrontation* 1978
5. To achieve its objectives, it is important that Artbank continues to acquire new artworks and that the collection remains current and reflective of significant and new and emerging movements in Australian art. This means that from time to time it is also necessary to de-access artworks from the collection. In general, artworks may be considered for de-accession when they are no longer suitable for rental, for example, because of fragile condition or conservation requirements, because they have become highly culturally significant, or because increased value means insurance costs are prohibitively high. Each artwork sold was assessed against the criteria in Artbank's de-accession policy as meeting the requirements for de-accession via sale.
6. \$ 1,552,147.00
7. \$120,775.00
8. The works were sold through Deutscher and Hackett (Sydney) and Sotheby's (Melbourne), auction houses with a previous track record selling similar artworks by each artist with good results.
9. It is not unusual for collecting institutions to not be named in auction catalogues when de-accessing works from their collection.
10. Jeffrey SMART *Cap d'Antibes* 1965: \$393,822.00  
Jeffrey SMART *On the Cassia* 1965: \$330,750.00  
Sam FULLBROOK *Roses* c.1970s: \$14,000.00  
Margaret OLLEY *Newcastle Harbour* c.1975: \$34,037.50  
Margaret OLLEY *Marigolds and Prickly Pears* c.1978: \$61,591.00  
Margaret OLLEY *Morning Brioche* 1982: \$58,350.00  
William ROBINSON *Untitled* c.1980: \$213,950.00  
William ROBINSON *Grassy Painting with William and Shirley looking at a Regency Bower Bird* 1985: \$75,919.50

John COBURN *The Tower* 1963: \$11,725.00

John BRACK *Confrontation* 1978: \$358,002.00

11. The Board of the National Gallery of Australia considers and makes decisions about all potential acquisitions in accordance with its acquisition policy
12. The artworks were offered for public sale. The artworks were not offered to the National Gallery as a gift.
13. Proceeds from the sales have been paid into the Artbank Special Account.
14. The redevelopment of Artbank's website is currently being finalised and is expected to be functioning in the near future.