

SPEECH BY DR NATASHA CICA  
AT THE NATIONAL LAUNCH OF *PEDDER DREAMING*  
THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, CANBERRA  
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It's wonderful to see this turnout for *Pedder Dreaming*.

I extend my particular thanks to Her Excellency, Ms Quentin Bryce, the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, for her grace and generosity in officially launching *Pedder Dreaming*. Anyone who has observed or encountered our current Governor-General in any professional or private capacity already will know that grace and generosity are two of her defining qualities. My book and I are very honoured by her presence today.

I also extend thanks to His Excellency Mr Michael Bryce; Her Excellency Ms Neda Maletic, the Serbian Ambassador to Australia; His Excellency Dr Hannes Porias, the Austrian Ambassador to Australia; Mr Sebastian Clark, representing the family of the late Australian historian Manning Clark; and the Hon Justice Mary Finn of the Family Court of Australia, for attending this national launch. Many people in this room have travelled from Hobart, Sydney and other places to be here today, and there are many here whom I have known for many years.

To me, *Pedder Dreaming* is a palpable reminder of why books matter, of why Australian stories matter, and of why Tasmanian

voices count. Australians who live inside the magic circle of Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra – the beltway of ideas, culture and politics, some would say – can easily forget how much that is important comes from the ‘edge.’ I know that when I lived inside that beltway, I sometimes lost sight of that truth.

But now I live back in Hobart. In fact, I mainly live on the idyll that is Bruny Island (an island off an island off an island). And I do have a Tasmanian voice, which you will find in this book. It may strike unfamiliar chords, sing from a somewhat different songsheet, depart from what is widely understood as ‘the Tasmanian tone.’ Which generally perpetuates a fantastical or fatalistic story featuring endangered forests with furry things, illuminated or enshadowed by fabulous light. Of course, that tale does tend to be true. And that – indeed, the connected story of wilderness photographer Olegas Truchanas, and of his artist friends with whom he worked to try to save Lake Pedder – is the portal through which I invite the reader to step. Beyond that threshold, I try to tell a much larger story about culture and civil society. The special gift from Olegas to all of us, was to use his eye on nature to open a new perspective on the relationship between people and place.

It is significant that Olegas Truchanas was a European émigré – a refugee – who strongly connected with a core group of Tasmanian-born locals after he arrived. So *Pedder Dreaming* is not just about culture. It is a story about multiculturalism, and the humanist sensibility that should accompany that.

In part, I was drawn to tell the story of Olegas because he was a displaced European man of the twentieth century, evidently with all the baggage, charm and intensity which that label imports.

My father Marko is also a European man who emigrated to Australia, in 1960, from Vojvodina, a polyethnic corner of the former Yugoslavia. My mother Elizabeth was Tasmanian, mainly of Irish and Swedish extraction. She was born and raised on a dairy farm in Scottsdale in the State's north-east, more recently a town hit hard by the forestry industry's decline. Our family's boom and bust Tasmanian story goes back many generations. It takes in the mining town of Derby up north, the Huon Valley down south (where earlier generations of the family settled in the 1850s), Devonport on the north-west coast (where I was born), and, in ways no-one still really talks about, Bruny Island (where I know at least one of my mother's distant forebears married into a Tasmanian Aboriginal family). And, of course, my mother crossed a different kind of 'colour line' to marry my father. So this event, and this book, closes some big circles for me.

Canberra has been an important part of my own story, and it's a real delight to be back here today. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to study at the Australian National University as an undergraduate, and later to work for the Parliament of Australia. Those experiences helped me understand some important differences in democratic perspective between the 'centre' and the 'edges' of our nation. They also helped me realise the importance of dynamic exchange between those different perspectives – so that the warp and the weft of our national fabric is as textured and

authentic as possible, and is deeply resonant with the lives and dreams of the broadest range of our people.

We're here today in a national institution that plays a crucial part in realising those aims. The National Portrait Gallery is an important repository of – and resource for – our evolving understanding of Australia's past, its present, its future. Its collection allows us to embrace a mature and expansive approach to shaping and refining our culture; to develop a more sophisticated *kulturleben*, as a German speaker might say. It's fitting then, that the powerful portrait of Olegas Truchanas by his friend Ralph Hope-Johnstone is part of this collection. Olegas was a Lithuanian, and a Tasmanian, whose story rightly holds a place in Australia's sense of who and what we are as a people.

I thank the National Portrait Gallery for hosting this event so splendidly. I also thank the University of Queensland Press – indeed, thank you Queensland – for investing in this work. It was encouraging and inspiring to me that a publisher from another part of regional Australia so strongly connected with this story, immediately recognising its importance in our national conversations.

When you read the book, you will find a fuller list of thank-yous. I won't recite them here, but I will single out some individuals today, all of whom are characters in *Pedder Dreaming*. You may not yet recognise their names, but I hope that you will grow closer to these people when you read my book.

Melva Truchanas, the widow of Olegas, has my special gratitude for sharing with me both her family's archive and her personal memories of her late husband. That was brave and generous, and I know that at times it was a painful thing to do. Most women would not have had that courage. Few would have displayed Melva's honesty and clarity of purpose throughout. She is a remarkable person.

The artist Max Angus, now aged in his late nineties, and his wife Thedda, also deserve special mention. At this very great age, Max stands on the edge of living memory. It was he who handed me so many of the keys to this Tasmanian jewel box. He pointed me to exquisite human and historical details, and helped me navigate some shifting sands, with infallible discrimination and discretion. Max is a gentleman, a diplomat, and a person of immense verve and vitality.

Elsbeth Vaughan, another of the Sunday Group artists and the very first Tasmanian friend of Olegas Truchanas, has been in my life as a personality since I was a small child, because of her other career in early childhood education. My late mother Elizabeth was also a teacher, and these two women held each other in high professional and personal esteem. It's through my mother that I know how much effort Elsbeth has always dedicated, privately, to including people who are somehow 'outsiders'. I will mention her practical support for our family friend Irene Olubas, a Hungarian who came to Tasmania as a refugee after the 1956 uprising. Elsbeth went to great lengths to ensure Irene could work here as a teacher, despite the very considerable disadvantage of

approaching English as a second language. Elspeth treated Olegas – another refugee – with similar respect and support. Contemporary Australia, collectively, could learn a great deal from her example.

I also thank Patricia Giles, another member of the Sunday Group. My times with Trish have been a pure joy, a kind of whimsical journey – a dreaming, if you like – through a garden of the soul, *her* soul. I think of her home and painting studio in Sandy Bay as a magical haven from some more prosaic realities we'd both prefer to avoid. I have a lingering habit of quoting Manning Clark, but one of the points of distinction he identified really applies to Trish: she is a true enlarger, not a straitener. It's so fitting that her photograph appears on the cover of this book.

Last but not least, I thank my parents – Marko and Elizabeth Cica. As some of you know, *Pedder Dreaming* took five years to write, and it was written through my mother's illness and her dying. She died last year of cancer, before the book was finished. She would have so loved *Pedder Dreaming* and this event. Fortunately, my father is here today to enjoy both. A lesser man than my father, and a lesser woman than my mother, would have resented the considerable time and energy this work took away from our family at that very difficult time. Instead, I was fortunate to receive unstinting support and encouragement from both of them for this book. Without that from them, we would not have *Pedder Dreaming*.

As you can see, this book is a beautiful picture book, as well as a story book. It is an exquisite object.

In that sense, for me it is a metaphor of what it might mean to be Tasmanian, Australian, and human.

What I have tried to do in this book is pick up threads of tales of immense, perhaps unspeakable loss – the loss of Olegas, the loss of Lake Pedder, the loss of our homes and homelands, the loss of our livelihoods or our ambitions, the loss of our most secret hopes and of our greatest loves.

I have picked them up and reworked them – to explore how and what we might learn from difficulties, from division, and from the darker shadows of our society and our selves.

Not to become or stay embittered. Rather, to build a new life, and open a sense of and a space for greater human possibility, even flourishing.

It is no accident that at the heart of *Pedder Dreaming* is the story of one man – a Lithuanian émigré and refugee, a labourer, a photographer, a family man, a thinker, a survivor, an adventurer, activist and artist; with the Tasmanian women and men who were his friends – who did exactly that.

Do enjoy reading my book. And as importantly, do be inspired by it to change something for the better.