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## **NAVA to produce Art Censorship Guide**

The National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA), today announced that it will produce an Art Censorship Guide, following extensive public debate about issues arising from the censorship of Bill Henson's artwork. NAVA is the peak body representing the professional interests of the Australian visual arts sector, and has had a long-standing interest in the art censorship question.

NAVA has been considering for some time, the need to better educate people about the scope of artistic freedom of expression in Australia and its moral and legal limitations. The Henson case has given NAVA the impetus to do something concrete about it, and to give some focus to people's desire to see something positive come from all the discussion.

In addition, as a way of guiding artists in relation to ethically working with children, NAVA will include a checklist in the next edition of the Code of Practice for the Australian Visual Arts and Craft Sector, which it is currently preparing for publication.

Tamara Winikoff, Executive Director of NAVA said today, "The Australian art world should not be complacent about Bill Henson's reprieve. From the recent dust-up, it is evident that these public ethics issues deserve much more informed consideration. We also need to get a better understanding of the scope of the law, the extent of police powers and the appropriate actions which can be taken by all parties when complaints are made. We intend that the Art Censorship Guide will provide this clarity," Winikoff continued.

The Art Censorship Guide is intended to educate artists, galleries, those who want to lodge a complaint and the police and security personnel.

It will:

- consider the ethical issues which are at stake
- address both the rights and responsibilities of all parties
- explain the jurisdiction of the law and how it is both interpreted and exercised, citing case studies
- give advice about how to plan for the public exposure of sensitive material and manage the debates that follow
- advise on the most effective ways to deal with complaints and threats.

Through extensive discussion and consultation, the guide will draw on the experience and knowledge of a range of experts involved in the arts, ethics and the law. As a result, the research may also make recommendations for legislative change.

In the interests of engendering some informed and thoughtful public debate, NAVA and Watch on Censorship last Thursday night (June 12th) co-convoked a public forum 'Art Censorship: the Bigger Picture'. The forum took place at the Foundation Hall, Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. Margaret Pomeranz introduced the event and David Marr chaired the succeeding discussion. The impressive speaker list comprised artist and educator Ian Howard, curator Tony Bond, child abuse activist Hetty Johnston, barrister Julian Burnside QC and public ethicist Clive Hamilton.

Winikoff commented, "One of Hetty Johnston's propositions made at the forum is a worry: the idea that some sort of board of scrutineers needs to be set up to which artists must go for permission to make art involving children. Real pornographers would laugh at the impotence of this kind of proposal while the work of genuine artists may be compromised by the laboriousness and potential conservatism of such a requirement. We have seen too many cases of artworks being misjudged or suppressed in their own time and later recognised as the defining cultural icons of their age".

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