

SCHWERPUNKT: AUSTRALIENS AUSWÄRTIGE KULTURPOLITIK

Cultural Strategies in Foreign Policy

Nigel Stanier, Cultural Attaché, Australian Embassy, Berlin

In Germany, and more generally throughout Europe, Australia has established an excellent reputation in theatre, contemporary dance, television, music, visual arts, film, indigenous arts, cultural heritage and national collecting institutions. At the Australian Embassy in Berlin, we have worked hard to capitalise on this reputation and promote an image of Australia that is democratic, welcoming, vibrant, intelligent and creative, rich and diverse. Promoting this contemporary image of Australia is an important part of our foreign policy in Germany and in Europe as foreign public recognition of Australia's cultural heritage provides a basis for the pursuit of broader Australia's foreign and trade policy interests.

For many Germans, especially those who have visited Australia, the high reputation of Australian culture is no great surprise. For others, we have found that promoting Australian culture is particularly effective at adding depth to an image of Australia that is almost always positive but can be overly simple. Audiences in Germany are often surprised at the level of sophistication of the performances, concerts, shows and collections that feature Australian artists. The recent success in Germany of the Australian film, *Long Walk*, and the popularity of the rockband Naked Raven are two small examples of Australia culture that have won a reputation for creativity and innovation.

Another example is the artsaustralia Berlin program, a six month program of contemporary Australian performance, literature, visual arts and film featuring 11 events and over 90 artists at Berlin's major cultural venues and festivals. The Australian Government has shown that it is serious about promoting Australian culture overseas by contributing more than \$AUD 700,000 towards the total cost of the program. The response to the program has been very positive and German audiences have appreciated the originality and vibrancy of the performances. As Maria Magdalena Schwaegerman, the deputy director of Berlin's Hebbel Theatre (which successfully staged part of the program in 2002) observed, "Australian artists are not limited by the weight of cultural systems and traditions that we have in Europe". The program will continue in the second half of 2003 with projects such as *Homeland*, a spectacular large-scale outdoor show performed live on the exterior surface of a building in Berlin.

In emphasising a contemporary image of Australia, however, there is always a danger of overlooking the historical influences that have shaped this image. We are very aware of the important but sadly underrated contribution made by Germany which extends as far back as the first colony of New South Wales when German migrants made important contributions in the fields of surveying, exploration, mining, and science. Few Germans, and for that matter few Australians, realise the extent of Germany's contribution to the founding of Australia. We see it as one of our tasks to change this.

In short, by projecting a contemporary and sophisticated image of Australia, and by keeping in mind important contributions that many countries including Germany have made to that image, Australian culture plays a central role in Australian foreign policy.