

# MEDIA RELEASE

**Media Release – Friday 13 January 2012**

## **The Jewish Museum of Australia announces its New Vision as it enters its 30<sup>th</sup> year.**

To coincide with the celebration of its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday in October this year, the Jewish Museum of Australia announces the launch of its new strategic plan in 2012. Under the leadership of Rebecca Forgasz, appointed Director in March 2010, the Museum spent almost 12 months conducting an organisational review, as a means of ensuring its future success and sustainability. Undertaken with the full participation of the Museum's Board and staff, in consultation with volunteers, visitors and key stakeholders, this comprehensive review critically examines the Museum's core purpose and the way it is perceived by its constituents.

Rebecca Forgasz says, "My greatest challenge stepping into this role was to develop a renewed vision and direction for the Museum in a community undergoing significant change. As religious and traditional observance in the Jewish community decreases, alternative, creative and contemporary ways of engaging with Jewish culture is growing. The needs, interests and priorities of the community are very different to what they were 30 years ago, when the Museum was established."

President of the Jewish Museum of Australia Negba Weiss-Dolev says, "The Museum was born at a time when many Jews in the community had at last made new lives for their families after the Holocaust. At a time when essential services such as schools, synagogues and aged-care facilities were being established, the founders of the Museum were motivated by a need to rebuild and reconstruct a lost culture and share their culture with the country they now called home.

"Thirty years later, we are still here and still have the luxury of looking back. However, the needs of our community have changed. If we are to remain relevant then we must change too. The Board appointed Rebecca Forgasz because she is an advocate of change. Any organisation needs to evolve in order to thrive."

As the Museum reaches this milestone it launches its new Strategic Plan – one that articulates a new vision for a new generation of museum visitors and supporters under a new generation of leadership. At the foundation of the plan is the Museum's mission statement: to engage people with Jewish culture.

"To a large extent I see myself as carrying on the original intention of the Museum's founders who were passionate about Jewish history and material culture, and, more importantly, sharing its riches with both Jews and the wider Australian community. However, while much of the original purpose remains the same, the way we deliver it needs to change. The Museum has always been an award-winning institution with content of high intellectual and artistic quality, with an audience of loyal and committed visitors and volunteers. Being relevant now means engaging with different sectors of the community; those less connected than others or connected in different ways, that's when we become a sustainable and relevant organisation."

The Museum's new direction will include increased programming for younger audiences who have high expectations and whose entertainment choices are vast. The Museum's collection, which has local, national and international significance, will be brought front and centre so that more visitors can engage, connect and be touched by the stories and memories these objects evoke. The schools education program will be directly linked to the national curriculum so that many more school groups can experience the dynamic and interactive programs as part of their school day.

In formulating the strategic plan, the Museum drew on audience research to understand people's motivations for visiting museums. This research consistently shows that people visit museums not

# MEDIA RELEASE

only to learn, but to relax, enjoy themselves and socialise. In order to increase the profile of the Museum, in order that it becomes a destination on the radar of museum audiences, it must prioritise the development of its services and facilities so that it is a comfortable, engaging and accessible space – a place that is easy and fun to spend time in.

Highlights of the Strategic Plan 2012–2014 include the following targets:

- 5500 collection records digitised for online public access via the Museum’s website
- 300 collection items exhibited at the Museum, in addition to those already on permanent display
- 15 temporary exhibitions presented over three years
- Over 100 short courses, programs and one-off events
- Increase participation rates of audiences under 40 by 40 per cent
- Annual opening hours increased by 30 per cent
- Increase schools visitation by 200 per cent
- Overall annual visitation increased by 90 per cent
- Online visitation increased by 75 per cent
- Museum’s membership base increased by 300 per cent

“One of the most important findings that came out of the research was that we needed to increase the number of people who are touched and changed by our work. *We must aim to have the greatest impact on the greatest number of people.* We need to create a space for different people to feel they can connect in ways that are relevant to their needs and interests – whether that be through the school curriculum or a weekend activity for the whole family,” says Rebecca.

The Jewish Museum of Australia’s next major temporary exhibition is ***Aleph Bet***, which is separated into two galleries; the first, in the Loti Smorgon Gallery, is devoted to the contemporary works of Marc Lopez Bernal. The second, in the Gross Gallery, contains a selection of objects from the Museum’s collection that have been selected with a child’s perspective in mind. Opening in April 2012, the exhibition will investigate the beauty and meaning of Hebrew letters as well as the sounds, shapes and objects that start with the letters so that children and families can participate and play with items from the Museum’s collection.

“While appealing to our loyal visitors, the exhibition will also attract new audiences. Young families with children learning the Hebrew alphabet, or those wanting their children to be exposed to Jewish culture in a non-religious way, will be targeted. The programs and courses around this exhibition will be playful, creative, alternative and spiritual – capturing the essence of our new vision,” says Rebecca.

In June 2012 the Museum will launch ***Calling Australia Home***, the redevelopment of one of its four permanent exhibitions documenting the Australian Jewish experience from 1788 until today. The accessible and engaging new exhibition will profile the Museum’s extraordinary collection in the new and dynamic Zelman Cowen Gallery of Australian Jewish History.

The late Sir Zelman Cowen, Patron of the Jewish Museum of Australia since its establishment, was one of the most distinguished individuals in Australian Jewish history. The gallery was renamed in his honour in 2009 on the occasion of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Sir Zelman’s last public appearance was at the Jewish Museum of Australia, where he celebrated his 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday and had a sneak peek at the exhibition contents of *Calling Australia Home*. Sir Zelman passed away in December 2011 and the new gallery will now serve as a fitting memorial and tribute to his life and contribution.

# MEDIA RELEASE

Rebecca Forgasz says, “In any account of Australian life, Sir Zelman Cowen is celebrated – the ‘healing’ Governor-General of 1977, an academic, soldier, Rhodes Scholar, Vice Chancellor of two universities. Sir Zelman always identified as a proud Jew and a proud Australian. His values set an example to our community about the sort of society we wish to be part of. We are incredibly lucky to have had his support and recognition of what we do here. He was such an extraordinary visionary; I know that we will carry his spirit with us as we implement our new vision in our 30<sup>th</sup> year.”

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***Aleph Bet*** opens in the Loti Smorgon and Gross Gallery in April 2012.

***Calling Australia Home*** opens in the Zelman Cowen Gallery of Australian Jewish History in May 2012.

To read more about the Museum’s new vision, download the Jewish Museum of Australia’s Strategic Plan or for further program and exhibition details please visit [www.jewishmuseum.com.au](http://www.jewishmuseum.com.au)

For all media enquiries and interviews with the Director, Rebecca Forgasz, please email [l.albeck-ripka@jewishmuseum.com.au](mailto:l.albeck-ripka@jewishmuseum.com.au)

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