

Art works moral rights holder: Leader of the Opposition Suite

I was the artist commissioned through the architects by the Parliament House Construction Authority to design, fabricate and install the furniture for the Leader of the Opposition's suite. It consisted of furniture for three rooms namely, an office, a sitting room and a dining room and was designed as a single integrated installation.

The terms of the contract stated that the suite could not be modified or amended without my permission. Shortly after its installation, prior to the official opening of the Parliament House, the then Leader of the Opposition, John Howard, had the furniture from the office removed and replaced. His stated reason at the time was that he considered it to be 'too progressive' for a conservative party. He totally missed the point. The suite was not designed for him, or the Liberal Party, or any other Party. It was designed for the Office of Leader of the Opposition, which would change its political hue across several parties no doubt during its lifetime. The suite was designed to reflect the role of opposition, which is essentially a relatively radical role in that it is charged with testing the sitting Government and destabilising its possible complacency.

Since then I have noted from television news clips that the chairs in the dining room also appear to have been replaced by furniture that is not related to the original suite.

These acts were clearly a breach of contract. A politician would not be permitted to cut out a third of a painting because it offended his or her sensibility. To remove a third or more of my suite is no different an act to this. The integrated suite as a whole constitutes a single artwork. The furniture was designed to last the projected life of the building (200 years) as was required by the design brief. It lasted only a couple of weeks before it was significantly violated. The suite belongs to the office of the Leader of the Opposition and to the people of Australia. It is not the property of any politician to be tampered with at will.

I urge this Inquiry to reinstate the suite in its entirety in line with the original design concept for the building.

John Smith