

Draft of a letter by Barbara Flynn to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 December 2018 (unpublished)

I write in my capacity as curator of several of the artworks cited in Charles Purcell's bold and inspiring defence of bold and inspiring works of art: Junya Ishigami's *Cloud Arch* and Tomás Saraceno's *Sundial for Spatial Echoes* at Barangaroo, and Hany Armanious's milk-crate-inspired *Pavilion*, as well as Tracey Emin's commission for the City of Sydney, *The Distance of Your Heart*, which was unveiled in March of this year.

The City of Sydney committed to realising Ishigami's *Cloud Arch* in 2014 at the outset of his career. He was still a very young architect at the time, and it was a bold move. This year *Cloud Arch* was the centrepiece of the definitive exhibition of Ishigami's work at Fondation Cartier, Paris, the exhibition that established him as the reigning genius of his generation. The City's gamble had paid off.

Cloud Arch is in the league of landmarks like the Sydney Opera House, and the *Gateway Arch* in St. Louis, Missouri, and it calls for an investment of vision and funds on that order. *Gateway Arch* cost the City of St. Louis and the US Government around A\$9.8 million (US\$11 million) in 1965 dollars – equivalent to around A\$120 million today. Another artist's cloud – the world's most famous public artwork, *Cloud Gate* by Anish Kapoor – cost the City of Chicago more than A\$32 million in 2004. 'The Bean', as it is affectionately called, is never without company, with typically hundreds of people at a time jockeying for selfies in its polished stainless-steel surface. When it comes to generating tourism, the City of Chicago has never looked back. *Cloud Gate* receives more visitors than almost any other Chicago destination; only the city's Navy Pier exceeds its visitor numbers. And *Cloud Gate* is an artwork.

Great cities get behind great works of art while building hospitals and schools and tending to infrastructure. The one does not preclude the other. Cities like Chicago and Paris do it all with the encouragement of the majority of their people, who vote with their feet and who declare that art makes their lives better.

I have lived in Sydney for the last 22 years, arriving here after the same length of time working in the art world in New York. Art that puts forward new ideas has historically always been controversial. Yet Sydney prides itself on being progressive, and in all these years I have never understood its reluctance to be progressive about art. It doesn't make sense. Works like *Cloud Arch* and Saraceno's *Sundial for Barangaroo* – now both shelved – are what is progressive about Sydney. When we embarked on them in 2013 and 2014, respectively, I hoped that it meant Sydney was ready and capable of seeing two extraordinary visions through, and of treating the artists well too – not another shameful Utzon/Opera House scenario. I was expecting to see Sydney strut a new maturity and assume the mantle of the city doing more than any other city in the world to commission artworks for the public domain. Yes, that is a fact – Sydney does lead the world in public art – and it is something to be very proud of.

I have been involved with art for 45 years and have never met someone who has remained lukewarm to a great and bold work of art for very long. These works grow on you. They become your own private icons and the source of your pride, the things you take your visitors to see – what makes the city your city, and a great city.

Barbara Flynn, Sydney